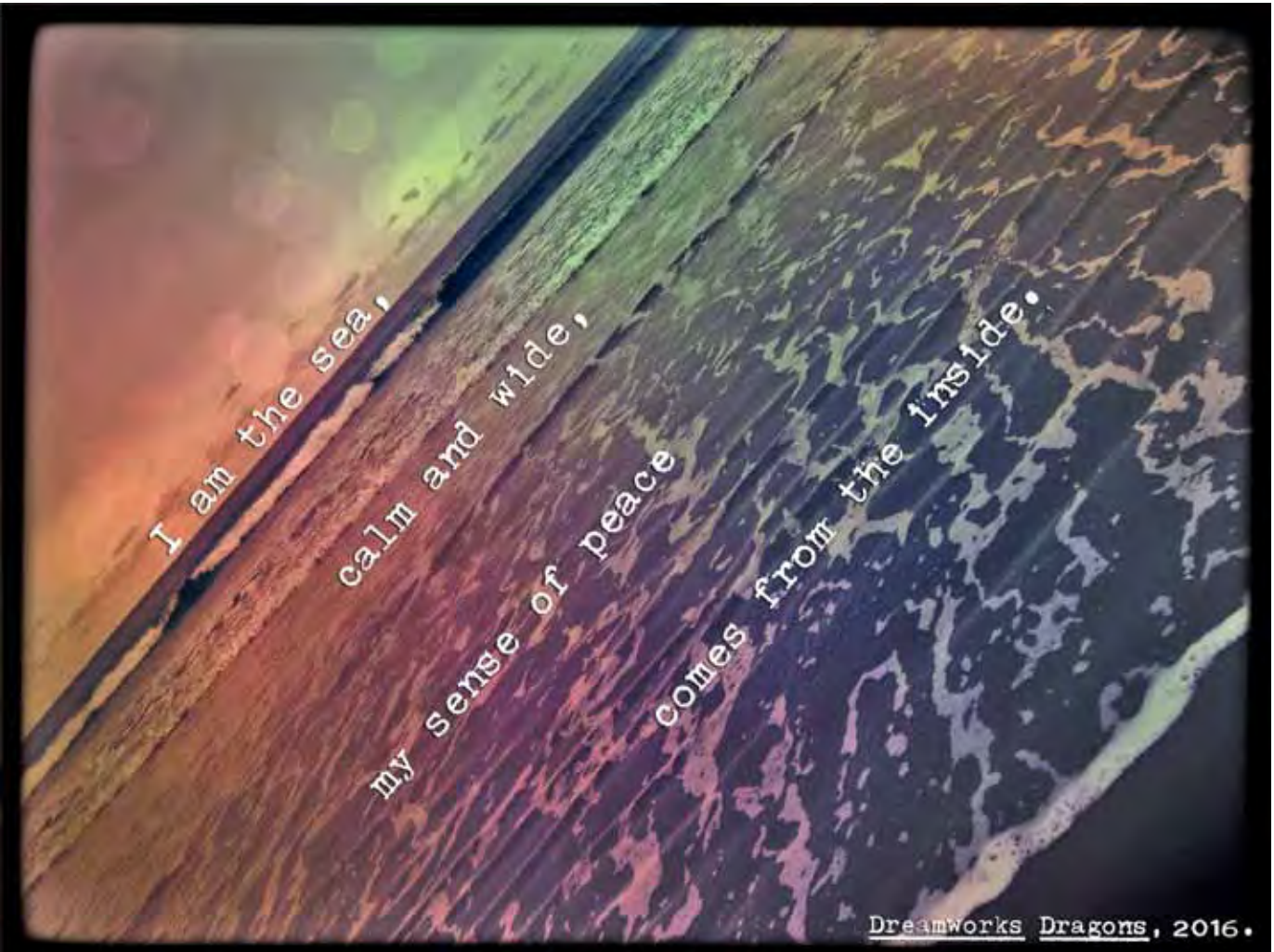




The Cenacle

★ 22ND ANNIVERSARY ISSUE ★

NUMBER 99 ♦ APRIL 2017

An aerial photograph of a coastline. The top left shows a hazy, orange-tinted sky. Below it is a dark, narrow strip of water or a beach. The rest of the image is a vast, textured expanse of land, likely a beach or dunes, with a mix of brown, tan, and dark patches. The text is overlaid on this landscape.

I am the sea,

calm and wide,

my sense of peace

comes from the inside.

Dreamworks Dragons, 2016.

May 13, 2017
10:11 p.m.
Café Bene-Mass. Ave.
Boston, MA.

Welcome to the 22nd anniversary
issue of The Cenacle, occurring at
a time when climate scientists are
terrified of the eventual collapse of
giant glaciers in the West Antarctic,
& U.S. President Trump day by day
presses the question of whether this
country can actually function ac-
ceptably while a psychotic moron &
his party of corporate shills, racist
ideologues, & eat-em-4smile government-
drowners-in-a-bath-tub suited clowns
accomplish nothing... very... loudly.
And maybe today you had a good
day. Happy news from a loved one, long
rainy day nap, maybe you hadn't
had a good milkshake in a really
long time.

Or a bad day. Job pressures
that won't quit, an asshole boss,
a paycheck that hasn't really
increased in years. A fight with

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a loved one. A chipped tooth. That really bad dream again.

On it was one of those many days in between, I buffered this way by TV news, & that way by a good book, & even a bit mysteriously by a phone message from someone in your past.

These kinds of days. Trump & Russians. Cyberhacking. Chocolate. First blooms of spring. Arctic ice melting. And each of us with a finite & unknown number of years to live, to care, to believe what we do matters to others, & to believe as well that others truly care for us.

Have human societies become so complex to reflect our strange & deep minds? Is there a far border to how intricate our shared lives on this planet can become? A planet we seem to share ~~over~~ more poorly with our non-human cohabitants? With each other?

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I don't know these answers, or anything resembling solutions to what keeps the ice from melting, or turns Trump into the superhero-genius-father-figure-God he schmoozes himself to sleep at night mulling over.

Some say you get the world you deserve. Be the change you want to see in the world. These are powerful ideas, but for most people they don't pay the bills.

Yet a benign or cynical quiescence works no better. We are empathetic creatures. I believe this is in our very makeup, how our race has endured. Violence hatred war for awhile, come in historically vulnerable moments, sometimes in the guise of a loud, incoherent, embarrassingly stupid man-child. But they recede. Kindness most binds.

I had a good day today, I sat side by side with my beloved & together for hours we built up

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This magazine from folders of words & images. We sat in a long-familiar hotel lounge in Boston, a sort of good luck charm place to do this work.

On my headphones, I listened to Leonard Cohen, Patti Griffin, Nirvana, Bruce Springsteen. Right now, Black Crowes. Lucky charms for me & my pen.

This issue is end to end full of fine writers & artists who have immersed in the questions & quandaries I am raising in this opening piece. You will find in their words a lot of empathy, suffering, joys.

I feel like we as a race are, as ever, in one ship, all rising or sinking together, & what it precisely seems to me is that one end of the boat is already under water, gone, near gone & yet at the other end of this ship there are those out fitting it for interstellar travel, dreams,

-30-

dimensions, dark matter, eternal
music, one, none, many, one, none,
many, now, hereon, forever.

Do we sink, or rise, or break
into pieces, some of us winning
short reprieves, the rest drowning,
the whole a failure in all?

The act of mortal living is an
unknowable mix of free will choices,
DNA limitations, economic determin-
ism, good luck, ill luck, possible
magic, & the chance of ethereal divine
intervention or cosmic indifference.
Among other things.

If you feel helpless at times,
in the face of Trump, melting sea
ice, the wear & turns of your own
years, you are not alone. Every
smiling face you see, every seemingly
indifferent one, feels helpless
at times too. Helpless, but
then again powerful, but then
again raggy, but then again
tender.

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You are not alone.
You are not alone.
You are not alone.

Every man & woman on this planet
ever born feels as you do.
Every green growing thing.
Every Creature you could ever
know does.
The Earth itself from which all
life has seethed for billions
of years.

You are not alone.
You are not alone.
You are not alone.

Please accept this Cenacle as
a gift of love & empathy from
all of its makers.

We hope with you.
We fear with you.
We dream with you.
We will sink or rise
with you. Promise



5/13/007
Boston, Mass.

The Cenacle

NUMBER 99 ♦ APRIL 2017

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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Front and back cover graphic artwork by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard. Original *Cenacle* logo by Barbara Brannon. Interior graphic artwork by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard, unless otherwise noted.

Accompanying disk to print version contains:

- *Cenacles* #47-99
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- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-17
- *RaiBooks* #1-8
- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
- Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights Series

Disk contents downloadable at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/supplementary_disk.zip.

The Cenacle is published quarterly (with occasional special issues) by Scriptor Press New England, 2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, 98107. It is kin organ to ElectroLounge website (<http://www.scriptorpress.com>), RaiBooks, Burning Man Books, *Scriptor Press Sampler*, The Jellicle Literary Guild, & “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/Soulard,” broadcast online worldwide weekends on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>). All rights of works published herein belong exclusively to the creator of the work. Email comments to: editor@scriptorpress.com.

Thank you to all of the wonderful contributors who have populated 22 years & 99 issues of *The Cenacle*’s pages. Considered altogether, your works of Art sum to amazing heights!



Feedback on Cenacle 98 | December 2016

From Tom Sheehan:

As my father always said, "We come with two things, love and energy, and we damned well better use them up." Judih Haggai's poetry reminds me of this, when she says: "*each time a chance to start again with more attention.*" And Martina Newberry's line, "*live, you who are left to listen.*" The energy and love there are almost visible, here and many other places in this issue.

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I was especially touched by the work of Martina Newberry and her poem "White Road." It encapsulates how I myself try to live, to endeavor to face the day head-on with bravery and confidence.

Ms. Newberry shows us the darkness and despair of the world we have created, but she still has the courage to say "*Yes*" in the face of all that might defeat us. A rare thing to see in the modern age—it is refreshing and very much needed.

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

In Martina Newberry's "White Road," The poet acknowledges that our ears are full ("While you still hear me"). But while there's still an iota of space, she extends hope. She reminds us that good that remains good. She supports the grain of innocence that remains within us.

Martina reminds us: "*There are still apples*" and "*caresses*" and "*the bare calves of a lover.*" And she reminds us with all the richness of

her sensitive eye, viewing all of the rest of it. She reminds us of the joys that exist and perhaps will serve to allow us to hear her (the poet) again.

* * * * *

From Colin James:

Since when was a clean and orderly personal environment indicative of a successful structured life? I got to thinking about this when reading Charlie Beyer's "Mechno Madness."

I am fascinated by old rusting cars and dilapidated mobile homes left derelict in the woods. Charlie's wildly intense descriptions of mining for sapphires in Montana contrast with the quiet deaths of the machinery and homes left behind like so many dreams. There is a zany bravery in Charlie's admitted-to dysfunction—for those like him in this world who go for broke. I hope he has good insurance.

* * * * *

From David Hartley:

"Mechno Madness" by Charlie Beyer makes me think of my friend who moved to Idaho to find prehistoric petroglyphs. Charlie's story, vivid with heavy applications of Murphy's law, describes a man who, like my friend, is working at the blinkering edge of cell comms and do-or-die craftsmanship. Towards an uncertain but laborious end.

I wonder if the sapphire claims ultimately paid off. One thing for sure, there is nothing that can go so terribly wrong that fixing it can't make worse.

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

The rants of David Hartley I find very engaging. Though he embraces the right wing fanaticism of sticking bullishly to an opinion, I almost found his arguments convincing. For that I cry: *good work*.

But I hope nobody believes him that we are moving into a glacial period. I'd like to hear more of his opinions, as there are so few who support Trump that can write a coherent sentence. Bring on your ideas and let's discuss them like gentlemen.

* * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Colin James's poems are quirky, sturdy pieces of eclectic furniture—chests of drawers on rockers, beds inside suitcases, with doors that open onto kitchens, cars, smells, winds.

David Hartley's rants are deserving of responses.

"Although I don't agree with everything Trump says, his objective analysis and legal duty as President is to enforce existing law to restore border integrity." My response: Restore? To what mythic past is the author referring?

"Illegal aliens are illegal, and deportation is not radical or racist." My response: Want to see an illegal? Look in the mirror. Ever broken a law? Congratulations, you're an illegal. Deport yourself to Europe.

"President Jimmy Carter deported thousands of Iranians in a short time in 1980, after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ruled that the 50 American hostages were to remain in the hands of the militants then occupying the U.S. Embassy in Tehran." My response: Carter's action targeted

individuals from a particular country related to a specific situation. Trump's actions are all about sticking it to Muslims and Latinos.

"Illegals are from all countries." My response: Yes, and again, they are closer than you think. Many of them are from the USA. Perhaps an illegal is currently wearing your underwear, working on your computer, sitting at your breakfast table. I know, you don't mean "illegals" *per se*; you mean "undocumented immigrants." Many of those have been deeply integrated into their communities for decades. The current madness rips apart families, smashes lives.

"Uncontrolled mass immigration is very dangerous . . ." My response: Yes, the colonization of the Americas by Europeans proved that. It also made it impossible, forever, for "Americans" to claim any moral high ground in trying to shut other people out.

" . . . and in direct violation of the U.S. Constitution." My response: A citation would have been useful here. Otherwise it sounds like you're blowing smoke.

"Illegal immigration is most detrimental to the poor." My response: Migration is a way for the Third World poor to get better health care and education for their children. In doing so, they provide inexpensive labor for developed countries. Why is it OK for multinational corporations to go anywhere they want, while laborers cannot?

If a corporation can use the poor of the Third World, it will pay them pennies; if not, they are cordially invited to eat shit and die. *"And what is a man without papers worth? Less than papers without a man!"*—Joseph Roth.

* * * * *

From Joe Coleman:

Raymond Soulard's powerful, pointed letter to President Trump inspired this poem from me:

Forty Five

"Make America Great Again"
was the cry of a puny specimen:
a cheapskate billionaire, smirking, philandering,
fork-tongued, arrogant, tax-dodging, slandering,
bully, con-man, stuffed-suit, no-class,
puffed up, humorless, tangerine ass,
who is so consumed by his self-love of Trump
he's blind to the fact he's become Putin's chump.

Now the swamp of D.C. is Circus Town,
and, regrettably, we elected this clown,
inflating numbers, inventing facts,
insulting randomly and tweeting attacks.
He boasts as he struts in the spotlight glow,
while hyping his dog and monkey show.
(The son of a bitch no doubt killed the pony
then served up horseflesh as steak . . . Baloney!)
Too many suckers were snowed by his jive
as he shot off his hair-trigger mouth—45.
If we fail to boot this heel from the tent,
we'll have a slapstick government
led by a horny, malevolent
celebrity clownish President.

I wasn't afraid of clowns 'til now.
How can we hasten his final bow?
How can we close the door on this crook?
When will we give this clown the hook?
Yesterday wouldn't be too soon
to say goodbye to the smug buffoon
—the orange clown who fills me with dread
—the lying clown from the New York tower
—the squint-eyed clown with zero cred
—the braggart clown with too much power
—the greedy clown who worships money
—the shifty clown and his sycophant-toads
—the boorish clown who isn't funny
—the clown who holds the nuclear codes
—the egotistic, narcissistic, proto-fascistic clod
—this argumentative, anal-retentive, less-than-
primitive fraud.

I saw that clown's Inaugural Parade . . .
Yes, I am indeed afraid.
What occurred on those steps was authentically
scary,
that ominous day in late January.
As Trump gloried shamelessly in those displays,
some augured signs of the End of Days,
Old Glory sagged like a funeral pall.
God bless America.
God help us all!

* * * * *

How to resist against Donald Trump

1. Focus on his policies, not his appearance.
2. Stay positive. He wants everyone angry and afraid. That is where he gets his power.
3. No more helpless/hopeless talk.
4. Support artists and the arts.
5. Take care of yourselves.
6. Don't just resist. Persist!



**Giving-Artist**

Giving-artist, you burrow a bolster behind
your frail loved one's back, prop him up against
a coming pain, a gentle drawing down
of colored pencil on rice-paper shoulders.
In a catered caress, served warm, you sculpt
a day from each tentative morning.

You delight in small points of progress,
turn your eyes toward his, illuminate
each embroidered leaf and spreading vine
of this last design, whether climbing up or trailing
like a curl of his hair, a wisp of a thing now,
more wish than turn, less spring or bounce;
still, you coil it 'round your finger gingerly
and hold it there, momentary makeover
before the mirror so he can see his reflection,
portrait in watercolor.

Enter a fine needle into the delicate fabric
his skin has become, draw it back, consider
the stitch, check the pattern again. He is all frame
now, your work shaped and stretched across
his bones. You pick up your craft and lay it down
as time allows. He sleeps. You will complete this art
in time, a gift of memory, as you have done
everything else, together.

* * *

This is My Body

I.

As I child, I sometimes stared into the tiny
 communion cup that held grape juice,
this is my blood, spilled, and imagined
 I saw the face of Jesus there, with the glow
 of overhead lights reflected like a halo.

By the age of five I was taught to take communion
 seriously; first, you must be saved, and ever after,
 you must first clear your unclean heart of current sins
 or risk becoming sick after the ceremony.

II.

Many years have passed since I took communion
 in the Baptist way, passing the cups around,
 with the unleavened slivers of tasteless bread.

So, a guest at the Lutheran sacrament,
 with my state of my heart lately un-pondered,
 I turned to a stranger and asked what to do.
 “You are welcome to take communion,”
 she said, “as long as you’ve been baptized.”

How strange for me to taste actual torn pieces
 of bread, *this is my body*, at the front of the sanctuary,
 to drink from a shared golden chalice,
 (the minister with his pure linen wiping the cup
 after each person passed)—

to hear no grave warning about the risk
 to my health of wine minus confession.

I wonder what the priest would have done if,
 as I brought my lips to the cup, I’d put my hands
 over his to still them,

looked in deeply, face hovering over the liquid
 to look again for God’s face,

and had seen instead only my own reflection, wet
 and aglow, as if I’d drowned and lived to wake again,
 looking up.

* * * * *



Out of the Forest, Pockets Full of Stone

[Travel Journal]

Soon after the lizard's visit, Rufino's cows encroach and start licking something behind Cabaña Supernatura on a low palm-slat platform used for dining and dishwashing—the place where I was first invited to share a pot of piranha and chili pepper soup with the family. I sprint toward the cows. (I see it all in slow motion now as I remember it, years later.) I spring up on the platform, skid on a patch of cow spit, land on the ground with all my weight on the side of my right foot. *Bam!* I'm on the ground, ankle throbbing like a giant bee stung it.

I hobble back to the family hut, where my belongings are. I grab a roof beam and swing myself up to sit on it. Pluck out the blowgun dart that's been stuck in the palm frond ceiling for months. Stick the wooden puff-bullet with its tuft of cotton behind my ear.

It's good to sit in the roofbeams. I learned that from the bat. And even if your ankle's sprained, you can imagine your arms are bat wings, yourself flying down off your perch, under the edge of the roof, out into the open, and up to dance above the level of the trees. I chill for a while, then let my limber body clamber down, careful with the ankle (not much weight on it), and leave the dart in the edge of the roof-leaves alongside with Rufino's blowgun.

At dusk, the family motors back from upriver, or perhaps downriver. I tell them about my ankle. Joaquín says, "How was the chooming?" I describe the vision of the bat. Then, sick of standing on my throbbing ankle, and wanting to be upside-down, I don my sunglasses and hang by my knees from a roof beam. "He looked like this," I say.

Maribel and Xiomara turn. Joaquín grins his gap-toothed Cheshire jaguar grin and says to them, "Toanké *oyo-bai*." Bat-man.

Everyone deploys foam mats, sheets, light blankets, and whatever they use for pillows, and hits the sack. Dave and I don't sleep much—though it's hard to tell where sleep begins and ends; we're still high, dialoguing esoterica, singing fragments of Beatles and Bob Marley songs, and laughing at things in our heads.

* * *

Everyone gets up at 3:30 because, other than Joaquín, we're all going to Lago Agrio: Joaquín's wife Maribel and their son Rufino, Rufino's wife and three of their kids, and we two *po-bai*, white guys. Dave's heading back to his apartment in Quito. I'm going to a neighborhood in Quito called Guapulo, to the Hostal Labirinto, the place Ché the cook invited me to stay at.

Despite an application of Dave's arnica gel, my ankle looks like an elephant's.

The 40-year-old olive green duffel bag is left over from my stepdad's army days. I pack it full of clothes, a book about runes, toiletries, and the small, heavy log of rare hardwood that the Chilean sculptor who looks like Jesus asked me to bring.

Dave and I say goodbye to Joaquín, who doesn't make much of a ceremony of it, scarcely raising his head from where he lies. In the dark, trailing Dave, I hobble down to the canoe, using, as a kind of cane, the musical bow, which he's given me.

We all ride Rufino's canoe upriver. Over the noise of the outboard motor, as the sun rises, Dave and I sing a Hebrew song we both know: *Hineh ma tov uma na'im shevet achim gam yachad*. "How good

and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”

Before long, our teacher’s son is running the canoe up on the shore at the port village of Chiritza. Time for the two-kilometer hike to the highway to catch the bus to Lago Agrio. Everyone else strides away. I limp along, supporting myself a bit with the musical bow, wryly appreciating that, even though my ankle is sprained, no one has offered to help me carry anything. Like the Waorani guy with the snakebite. Gotta be self-reliant when you can. The pebbles along the road are very colorful. I stop to pick them up and take them along.

When hobbling down the road with a sprained ankle, I think, always pick up stones. Write that down for the book. I stop and take out my notebook and write it down. Maybe, I write, rocks hitch rides on people just for fun. We think we’re the ones who are choosing them, but no. Gems are famous for this shit. They just like to joyride. They’re like burrs.

When I finally limp up to the highway with my pockets full of stone, I find my friends sitting by the roadside. They say they’ve been waiting there for the bus for an hour and a quarter.

At that precise moment, the bus pulls up and whisks everyone to Lago.

Dave and I say goodbye to Rufino and his family, who are going shopping. Then we say goodbye to each other. He’s leaving right away. I’ve decided to rest up and investigate Lago.

A big hug between brothers. I turn away, walk a block, check into a hotel. Hobble to a store I saw on the way that sells esoterica—books of spells, dried bits of plants, herbal remedies, bottles of oil rendered from the fat of animals.

I make friends with the owner, a long-bearded mestizo shaman from Colombia. He sells me a jar of salve and a bandage for my ankle. Some kids are hanging around. I sing “1999” by Prince to them.

Over the next few days I write a 23-page poem in my notebook and make friends with an Ecuadorian sculptor from the mountains who runs another store.

I take the bus back to Quito, eight hours straight up out of the Amazon into the Andes, like a bumpy ramp to the sky.

* * *

Before flying back to the States, I spend a pleasant week at the Hostal Labirinto in Guapulo hobbling around with Ché Aragonés the cook; his brother Rumiñahui, named after an Inca general who fought the Spanish; and the bearded, Christ-like sculptor, who’s glad to have his chunk of hardwood, and teaches me Chilean slang.

Every time I go to bed, I hear crickets singing, and it takes me a few nights to figure out they’re only in my mind.

* * *

Back in the States, Deirdre breaks up with me. She’d been with someone else, too. Some tears were shed, but the two of us now could cease to annoy each other.

I resume living in my mom’s basement. She is patient with me and never charges me rent or even for food, though I can tell she is observing me closely for signs of brain damage.

I work briefly at the Café Trieste before getting fired for giving away coffee to a homeless guy whose girlfriend had broken up with him the night before. I get a job teaching English at a language school. Working with a room full of students from up to ten different countries was like traveling round the world without a plane. I figure I can learn as much from the students as they from me. They are windows on the worlds they come from—funny, passionate, determined windows.

At night, alone in my room, I pray, as Jamie Bear had taught me, for a vision that will guide my life, and for the power to heal; and I drink, little by little, from a one-liter bottle of yagé I’d smuggled



Artwork by Nathan D. Horowitz

out of Ecuador from Joaquín's place until, by December, I finish it.

* * *

New Year's Death

*Behind the words,
I teach anti-language.
A bat taught me.
A spider taught the bat.
A jaguar inhabited me.
A planet wept me. A circle squared me.
A story told of me and went on to speak of other things.*

*An owl slides across planes of air above the night woods.
The moon, hazed by light cloud, is just over half full.
Snow hugs the ground.
The owl's shadow glides over the snow.*

*I reported on the flight of owls and the metamorphoses of clouds.
I came to you live from the battlefield of my heart.
I went on vision-hunting expeditions with my companions.
We killed huge dreams with our spears.*

*I'm staying at my friend Murray's house. He's out at a New Year's Eve party.
I didn't want to go. I had a little bag of mushrooms.
If I want to, I can read The Art of War by Sun Tzu.
Or Memnoch the Devil by Anne Rice,
who can be counted on to provide stylish entertainment.*

*I put on Mozart's Jupiter Symphony.
When the lamp's off and the mushrooms kick in,
the darkness blooms.
The world's bound together by spells.
For a moment, I can dance like Nijinsky.
Like the sorcerer at Les Trois Frères.
Sniffing the air like a stag,
I hold still for an instant
between the catastrophes of the past and future,
knowing I have to go on.*

* * *

My dad's dad has been getting older, as one does, and, on a late January day, while my grandmother is out for a walk around the hallways of their apartment building, he dies at the age of 92, seated in his bedroom in front of a TV on which a cop show is playing. We bury him two days later, on my 28th birthday. My grandmother mourns him in the traditional Jewish way, sitting shiva. Every day at eight in the morning and eight in the evening for seven days, I am part of a *minyán*, a prayer group of ten Jewish men, reciting Kaddish, the prayer for the dead.

My grandfather leaves me \$10,000 in telephone company stock. I cash in \$7,500 worth of it: \$5,000 for a loan to my aunt and uncle to develop a piece of property, and \$2,500 for me to take to Ecuador.

I find a girlfriend, one of my co-workers at the language school. Ricki is eight years older than me, and has just come back from three years' teaching in South Korea. I won't be able to stay with her for long, as I am planning to go back to Ecuador and really do the apprenticeship with Joaquín for as long as it takes. I understand from my reading that an apprentice needs to be celibate for at least a year and a half, or else the spirits won't go to him. Before that begins, though, I am free. I hadn't intended to become Ricki's lover—it all started with an innocent full-body coconut-scented-oil massage—but once I do, I am in no mood to protest. She is an elf queen with a heart-shaped face, green eyes, and brown hair. Her fingers bear silver rings from Thailand. She likes poetry and cock. In the mornings when I wake up at her place, she cooks vegetable omelets and brews strong coffee.

One day I conclude that, for reasons of morality, since she and I are making love, we should be married. I call her on the phone. She isn't in, so I leave a message on her answering machine, asking her to marry me. When I am in her room that evening, I bring it up again. She doesn't say anything, just smiles her green eyes at me, puts on a CD of some singer-songwriter who is popular among cool people older than me, places her silver-ringed hands on my shoulders and, for a long time, dances with me. She's already signed a contract to teach for a year in Senegal. But maybe we'll see each other again.

At home, my mom worries about my mental health. She tells her friends I am still involved with drugs, and they shake their heads sadly.

My dad is uncomfortable, but less judgmental. When he tells his friends about what I am doing, one or two of them say, "He's studying with a shaman? That's great!"

My dad and my grandmother are talking to me one day. She says, "You need to find a direction in life."

He says, "Nathan *has* a direction. We just don't like it!"

I say, "It's South."

In September, I nuzzle the feline fuzz on Ricki's chin one last time, smooch her goodbye and, with \$1,500 from teaching and \$2,500 from the phone company stock, fly down to Quito.

Shouldering my gear in an old green army duffel bag that my stepdad had left at my mom's place when he moved out, I descend into the Escher labyrinth that is the neighborhood of Guapulo. A tough-looking mulatto leaning against a building tips his head back, narrows his eyes, and greets me without smiling: "*Hola, loco.*" Hello, madman. I don't know who he is. His greeting me that way spooks me. It reminds me of what the Cheshire Cat said to Alice: "We're all mad here."

On the street of madness, the Cheshire mulatto tells me we'd met before. His name is Mauro, he reminds me. He is a cousin of Ché and Rumiñahui, the guys who run the Hostal Labirinto, and he is living and working with them. The two of us walk there together. Ché calls out, "*¡Toanké! ¡Bienvenido, hermano!*" He gives me a bro-shake and a hug and checks me in. A few days later, I am back in the forest.

* * * * *







Watching *The Wizard of Oz* in Prison

we sit there straining & stiff
in straight-backed chairs

half a dozen of us
following Dorothy's naïve plunge

into trouble & Technicolor
a fantasy less enchanting

than in the innocence of our youth
what is Dot but a body dressed in innocence?

her Betty Boop *oh-mys*
her dance-stepping along the avenues

like a skipped stone or drop of paint
from a bucket left on a booming speaker &

how she makes friends with strangers
what her mama warned her about

more likely to encounter one of us
cowardly heartless & out of our minds

we forgive her this slip-up
having come with her so far

we go on following at a safe distance
like guardian angels with bloody swords &

when we arrive at the Emerald City
we sneak thief-like through the gates

wanting to see her achieve her goal
which is the same as ours

* * *

“What Is Your Idle Job?”

—*mass e-mail’s subject line with typo*

I wait for lunchtime at my desk, spinning
like a boy in a barber’s chair. Come noon, a walk
past pretty girls in flowered clothing, faces blooming
from sunlight’s brownish blush.

I sit awhile, lotus-like beneath a shady willow,
breathe smells of cut grass, melting chocolate.
I feed squirrels, sing love songs to pigeons,
watching as they bob their heads in rhythm.

Then it’s back to the office for coffee
tasting like gasoline, maybe a doughnut on the sly.
If my boss pops over, checking my progress,
I greet him with a good-natured pat on the back
to wipe sticky glaze from my fingertips.

After, it’s time for all the important tasks: I shuffle
blank pages, transfer calls to disconnected numbers.
I wink at my window-reflection. I liaise.

Mostly, I deal with people coming looking for me.
I give directions, always surprised if they reappear,
winded & flushed, to ask me where I am.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Six

*I ask the Universe tonight:
What if Dream-Mind is Supra-Consciousness?*

I'm Back at the Desert Festival, Again

I'm back at the desert festival again, really it seems, surprise, delight, & again I am wearing a certain hat, one I shared with a small Creature friend of mine, this friend who traveled with me. It's a warm fisher hat, with a chin-strap. I found it on the old green bus back in the city, the last one of the night, returning from the hospital, in the very back seat. It'd fallen in a dark crevasse, & I thought of my little Creature friend, who was always cold. Folds nicely to fit his much smaller head.

One day I did not know where he was anymore, & I kept the fisher hat to remember him, & then another day I did not know where the hat was anymore. And days upon seething days, till recently, when dreams nudged into my waking, taking me by the scruff & nudging, & nudging harder, until one moment I open my eyes, & I'm back at the desert festival again, & my little Creature friend's fisher hat is in my hands.

I would sit down, back then, on the desert floor, night-time, desert festival loud & cheerful all around us, & I would look at my little Creature friend, & he would look at me, very calmly, & suddenly I am calmer, because he is a good little Creature friend. He knows how I get, excited, overblown, too full of the dramas for any one of them to take hold, offer a path.

He has very deep dark eyes, a pleasant purple fur, & I'm very glad for him, & he reaches out his little paw & pats me on the nose & I think: *my, how cool you are, & how cool you are, & how cool you are . . .* then he hops off my knee, & begins to do his desert dance, a kind of frenetic rocking back & forth, the ribbons in his paws & his fisher hat flying wildly about him, like he can listen to all the human musics, & the desert noises, & the wind, & the celestial music above, & the roiling in the earth itself below, & dance it wildly, happily, calmly, freely . . .

If I am back here again, can he be too? Can I find him? Give him his fisher hat? Hold him on my knee again? Watch him dance his beautiful dance again?

* * * * *

Mulronie the Space Pirate

Well, you know, it's like I always say, & I've been saying it for a long time, because it's something that my dear friend Mulronie the Space Pirate taught me. *You never know with people-folks.*

Now I know every one of you reading these lines, dozens, hundreds, thousands, bajillions, you've read the five famous books written about Mulronie the Space Pirate. The shortest, mightiest bandito in all of outer space. You well know that when he was twelve, in 1951, he had a strange encounter, under the starry skies, out in the fields beyond the farmhouse where he lived. Something happened that night, & it changed him. And you know that when he was a young feller, in 'bout 1969, he was part of that *other* mission to the moon, the one you *don't* hear about.

You know all that well, & you know how the books detail his eventual departing Earth, Terra, homeland, whatever you may call it, he called it many things, & how he made his way, by one means & another, into the far reaches of outer space.

But what you don't know is that in the year 2402, so far away from those starry skies back in that mythical year 1951, there came a sixth book about Mulronie the Space Pirate's adventures. None of you know that. I'm telling you tonight, this is a confession that there was indeed a sixth book, detailing the final adventures of Mulronie the Space Pirate, beyond what you know.

Now you may get worried & say: *oh dear, did he finally perish after all those years?* No, he didn't. He found himself a nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid—so far away from everything else, you'd think it was Kansas. But he had those later adventures before that kind of quasi-retirement he went into. It was those adventures that made the retirement possible, because he learned finally how to travel without moving, how to raise his kind of hell without lifting any of his thirteen fingers. That book does exist, I know, because I wrote it, his dear friend, his companion.

It was a long neighborhood, on that nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid like Kansas. There were two houses, his & mine. We kept them far apart from each other, by agreement. I'd keep the manuscript of the sixth book overnight, wake up at first light, walk halfway toward his house. He'd meet me, take the manuscript, securing it under his arm, & we'd walk the rest of the way to his house, & continue our work.

But what happened was the wind hit, & it blew hard, & he staggered, & he tumbled, & the pages blew all over the place, & there were no Woods to catch them, & there were no clouds to keep them from flying away, & *my goodness how those pages flew*, they flew all over the world, all over that nice, small, semi-habitable world. We found all the pages we could, but not nearly all of them. It would have been much longer a book. But he was ready to retire soon, & just said, *let's do with what we have, my friend. Let the rest go.*

* * * * *

I'm Drowsing, Over a Football Game

I'm drowsing over a football game in the early wintertime. The snow has been falling & falling all weekend. I've watched it pile higher, up to & halfway over the one window that I have to see outside. I'm safe inside, & it's warm, but I don't know how I'll pay the heating bill next month, or the electricity bill, or the phone bill. But I think to myself: *if this snow keeps falling, I'll be buried & warm like the polar bear in the wintertime*. So go my future business plans.

I'm watching the football game on my black & white TV, every so often adjusting my Antennar 2000 to try to bring in the picture a little bit more clearly. I find my eye drawn to one particular football player, and start to feel like I'm watching two games at once. He plays for the Los Angeles team, has played for them for a long time. I knew him once, a long time ago, he was my friend, & now he's much older than that, & so am I, & so it seems like I'm watching two games at once.

I'm watching the game long ago in which he ran for many touchdowns. I think they even brought him out to punt the ball once. He could do no wrong, & they cheered & cheered, & cried out his name. People painted it on their bare chests, & on their bald heads.

But the other game I'm watching is probably a more recent game, my Antennar 2000 can't tell time anymore. He's now kind of fat, sloppily uniformed, & I guess they keep him around out of sentiment. He's an institution. They don't even call the plays in his direction anymore, because then people start to laugh. He mostly stays in to block because he's so big & fat, it often helps, people fall around him.

Glance out the window from my two games, & see that the snow is piling higher & higher. I'm thinking: *O! To be a polar bear, now that the winter is here*. Look back to the black & white TV screen, & see the pretty quarterback, in the newer game, dropping back & throwing the ball, & it's tipped up, & it rides high up into the air &, as though an air current itself had a funny sense of humor, the ball falls into my old friend's fat hands!

He probably hasn't caught a pass in five or six seasons, & he staggers wildly around with the ball, not remembering what to do or how, his old body moves & memories all gone. He runs the wrong the way, & then he trips, & he falls down near the sidelines, & I'm thinking to myself: *please, ball, just roll out of bounds & save my friend's pride for one more day*, & it rolls closer & closer to the out of bounds markers.

In the older game, they put him on defense near the end of the game, & he roars through the line, crushes the pretty quarterback, ball jumps loose, & he scoops it up, & dances & jives his way to the end zone. The stadium lifts off with cheers for my friend.

* * * * *

*You've got to pay attention to the signs in your life. You've got to look around for clues,
there's all sorts of information & guide points everywhere, but you've gotta pay attention.
You can't be controlled by your dogmas & your presuppositions.
You've got to just look around with open eyes, listen in strange ways, any way you can.*

* * * * *

Couple A & Couple B

It is the old & well-known story of what happens when there is a Couple A & a Couple B. Couple A & Couple B meet in college. Couple B walk hand in hand into the student center, & they sit down at a table near Couple A, & they all start talking. Couple B is prettier, Couple A is kindlier. They switch up at times, becoming Couple C & Couple D, & two stray, Couple E & Couple F, & stray further, to form Couple G & Couple H. But eventually Couple A & Couple B reform.

Some years after college, Couple A & Couple B going to the Red Sox baseball game on the weekend, one of them holds up the best sign in the whole park, & they win the local TV station's "Take a Swing!" contest. As prize, they get to play an inning against the Red Sox, right there at Fenway Park.

For the first play, Couple A-he gets a single. Maybe the Sox are kind, don't try too hard. Couple B-she takes a walk. Couple B-he bunts, & the Red Sox let all runners advance safely. Laughing lazily, rich, good-looking guys in tight white uniforms.

The fourth one, though, Couple A-she, smashes the ball just over the left fielder's glove. (She's the leading hitter by a country mile in her local softball league. *Shhhhhhh!*) The fielder slows it, that's all, then wilds around for the ball. Another fielder rushes to help him—they're panicked—they hadn't expected this. They throw the ball back to the infield, but it just rolls away toward the dugout &, by the time the chaos & panic has settled down, there has been struck, inside Fenway Park, by these seeming amateurs (*Shhhhhhh!*), an inside-the-park grand slam home run. And, as a result, the Red Sox have to pay them \$10,000 total—\$2,500 per run—, plus make a \$10,000 donation to the Jimmy Cancer Fund.

Delight delight delight, everyone says, newspapers catch the gleam of their smiles, their pretty figures, the laughing charms in their eyes. Then days, *dot-dot-dot*, weeks pass. He sees a tiny blue light again on the ceiling of their bedroom. Thinking of his small Creature friend, his small friend's fisher hat, the desert festival. The small Creature friend's dance, better than any coupling, any inside-the-park grand slam home run.

* * * * *

It All Comes from the Book I Was Reading

Now you can say what you want, but I say that it all comes from the book I was reading. It was for a class, & it was a day late, should have read it yesterday. It's how these things go sometimes.

Our house is kind of tipped in design. I climb from one half to the other, settle into the lowest end of the couch to read, where I'm least likely to just tumble on out mid-page. And on the last page of the book I'm reading, the girl's telling the boy she had a good time the other night, & it ends, & I can't tell if a page is missing. I just don't know. I stare at the book, & I just don't know. Will young Mulronie leave pretty Figga after all, for the romances of outer space, that secret mission to the moon & beyond?

Anyway, I put the book in my knapsack & I head off to class that, mind you, was held yesterday, but I wonder if I can say something anyway. Along the way I figure: *well, since I'm late, maybe I'll just go in & see a movie*. There's this movie theater I like, it's down an alley, although the sign that marked it has long since been gone, so you *really* gotta know it's there or you'll never find it. I walk, still wondering about my book. Mulronie always packs his black & white TV with the Antennar 2000 last &, *when & only when they're packed*, he goes.

It's a fairly big room. And the thing about this theater is that it doesn't have the usual rows upon rows of theater seats. It has an assortment of chairs, different kinds & sizes, armchairs & rocking chairs & so on, & the movie screen is small & it's over in one corner. So I pick up my favorite green armchair, lucky it's empty, & I move it as close as I can to the screen, trying not to get in the way of others who were also peering toward the screen, everybody trying to get a look. Because nobody actually charges us to get in, we try to have our manners.

When it comes on, it's in the middle of the story, as the movies sometimes are at this theater. It seems to be a movie about a football team. The grizzled old veteran is showing the brash first round rookie how to play, how to win right. He feels he can't do it anymore, he believes he's on his way out. The fans laugh at him now, & the team usually only lets him block these days, not carry or catch the ball. His leadership in the locker room, coaching on the sideline, these are shadowed over by his big belly, grizzled jaw, slack-mouthed grin at everything.

But I can feel the hotshot rookie's loyalty to him, the long-time loyalty of everyone else on the team to him still. No matter his lesser gleam, his diminished speed. He's their *leader*, he's their *man*. I want him to go out & play one more game, & I want him to ride out high. The movie ends suddenly before we can find out if he does. Puff of smoke, & the film on the screen burns to white.

Everybody sits around for a while, some smoked blunts, some talked politics, some looked for M&Ms on the floor. There were always one or two. Since there were no candy concessions at this theater, you had to get what you could. A few of the skeptical hipsters who'd stuck around this long decide to venture into the murk beyond the movie screen to a **Bar** they say is on the other side. Don't see any of them again tonight.

Anyway, then a short cartoon suddenly comes on, it's about 30 seconds long & it goes like this: *they discovered that what had been slowly destroying their world all these centuries were people just like them, only these people were thousands of times bigger than them, & no more knowing that they existed than these tiny people had known the big people existed. But these tiny people embarked on a great mission to bring them down, by growing bigger in time. They vowed they would grow bigger, & they would bring the big ones down, & before you could even think twice, this short cartoon was over.*

* * * * *

I was at someone's house, it was a friend, she had this large jug of LSD, it was brown-tinted, it was kind of a pretty brown, almost like a dye but I don't think so. She was very generous with this LSD, every time I came she made sure I got took care of, that I got risen up, that I got high. She knew I was struggling with my worry about paying rent. Then what happened one night was that, I don't know, I didn't get high, it didn't work, maybe it did, & I just didn't notice, the worry had overcome me. She was tired, she had to go to work the next day, she went to bed, & so I went into the little refrigerator where she kept all her medicines & chemicals & do-dads & I poured a little more LSD from her jug into my cup of orange juice, maybe a little more after that, I just had to finally evict this worry from my mind & not worry about rent except for the first of the month. But I must have poured out too much because now it looked like there was a lot less in the jug than there was, & so I got panicked & I brought the jug over to the sink & I filled it up with water a little, but now that beautiful brown color was gone. It was watered down & I just didn't know what to do, & it's like in the course of trying to expel one worry, rent worry, I'd taken on another, so maybe there's a lesson in there for you or, honestly, maybe there isn't.

* * * * *



Here I Am, Standing in My Old Hometown

Here I am, standing in my old hometown. But, I'll tell ya, it looks a lot more prosperous than it used to. I find myself again on the street that used to have the bookstore I went into to buy 10-for-a-dollar paperback books out of a crate, & downstairs in its basement the burger joint where I'd sit in the corner, read my frail paperbacks, & write *lurve* poems.

Now it's all different. I stare at the pink neon sign **Mulronie's Original Genuine Gourmet Space Pirate Burgers!** & walk in. Not a paperback book in sight. Not even the Mulronie books. I *loved* those books. Just a weird, worn-looking full-sized cut-out of Mulronie in his Space Pirate suit, standing near the famous Space Tugboat, commandeered by the tiny cackling black & white pandy bear, sitting in Mulronie's hand.

Should I feel this furious? Didn't I leave this joint, this street, this whole town, a long time ago? But I do feel this furious, more than I ever have. Someone asks to take my order & instead I sit at an empty table, saying I am waiting for someone. *OK, sir. Let us know.*

I look around. The exposed brick walls are the same. Just everything in the middle is different. Then I remember something that could help my fury. Up high toward the ceiling, there is a brick that I happen to know is a kind of explosive. The owner of the joint back then only told a few of us regulars about it. Called it his Plan B Retirement Plan. He didn't actually tell me; I just overheard them talking one night. He pointed up there & said in his unearthly drawl, "I just take a chair & climb up there, pull out that brick, & the spike behind it, & drive the one into the other. BOOM! Whatever problems I got, solved. End of the world."

So I take my chair, & I climb up there, & I begin pulling at bricks to find the right one. And I hear below the consternation over what I am doing, & would likely be hauled down by the town cop (maybe there was more than one, but they always looked the same to me), but I find it, & I pull it down, the brick & the spike. Set them on the table before me, & think: *Do I want to do this?* Nod, & I raise the spike in my hand, & drive deep right into the brick to end the world!

I find myself back in a kind of a little store, the one they say has a buried spaceship beneath it. There's a red-haired girl behind the counter that I knew, oh-so-long-ago, it aches me to think of it. I lean forward to kiss her, since the world has ended, & yet somehow it hasn't. Has & hasn't.

Now we're sitting, facing each other, on the floor, & others are walking past, smiling at us, wondering: *who are these two crazy kids, & why does one of them think the world has ended?*

* * * * *

My Beloved & I Keep Going to These Strange Parties, Over & Over

I don't know what happens but my beloved & I will find ourselves in a very cluttered living room, waiting for someone who's on the phone in the other room. So I'll be looking around thinking, *what can I put together here to sweeten her way?* And I find a Mason jar, & I mix in a little bit of chocolate, a little bit of coconut, from pouches I keep in my book-bag. Dashes & drops from flasks on the shelf with no labels on them, just for fun. I take a sip on it. It tastes drinkable.

And then a lot of people show up at that moment before my beloved can take a drink of this. Perhaps

it's for the better, since what kind of mad concoction had I made? Anyway, I don't know anybody here, that's the kind of strange parties we've been going to.

But, happily, I sort of ease into a corner, & my beloved eases into the corner with me. Right near to the shelf with the strange flasks, & the empty one above it. I reach up to the empty one, tug, & it comes loose from the wall into my hands. It's made out of lots of pieces of wood, strange pale wood, wood that seems to almost *hmmmm*. These pieces of wood are twisted & braided together to form this board, & I'm going to hand it over to my beloved, so she can study it too, when it just sort of floats over to her. She catches it in her hands, & smiles, & floats it back over to me.

Then I nod to her, she nods to me &, I don't know how we do it, but we together climb up on that board & float out through the open window into the clear night. *Goodbye, good night to another strange party.*

* * * * *

I'm With a Group of Friends

I'm with a group of friends. Dear ones. We're sitting around a table in the brown-paneled back room of that old Italian-Polish restaurant, & my old friend the Traveling Troubadour is there, strumming his guitar happily, blue eyes twinkling for all. But I know he's really gone & I have to go out to the bar in the other room to catch my breath for a moment. One of my friends comes out to see if I'm OK. She saw him too.

We go back in & I ask him, *what's your life like now, wherever you are, up in the stars?* And he smiles big & says, *smokin', drinkin', guitar-playin'.* Then he gets serious with wailing pretty on his guitar, his beautiful voice once again filling this brown-paneled room, like years long gone.

Later we all leave that restaurant, 'cuz it's a beautiful night out, & we pile into somebody's car, & we're tight up against each other in the back, cheek to cheek, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip. I feel so fucking happy at this moment, & I close my eyes, & we come to some kind of party, & it's a very cluttered place, hard to say what kind of party's going on here anyway. Two laughing people are floating on some kind of board above the clutter, laughing, laughing hard, departing through an open window.

I get this idea that something really important is in the middle of this clutter, & I go searching through it all, pushing things aside, almost randomly. And then I find them, these Secret Books that I only ever find in dreams like this one, & there they are, unharmed, & I just open one up because I know that my time with them is short, & this kind of reading's the best kind of reading.

I dive in, & start reading about the King who summoned his brothers on a great quest, his mission to lead them to a mysterious Island. On the Island, to find a timeless, powerful Gate; within it, a being who might help them save the world. Carries with him a Secret Book of his own, within it a map to the Island.

But one night along their years-long way, tired, drooping, they let loose in a sort of coffee house in a Village, start carousing & fighting. What causes the fight is that they see specters of their lost loves in the murk of the Tavern, people they left behind years back to go on this quest. These loved ones are sad & missing them, yearning for them to return. It's a night where the quest may just fall apart out of sadness for what is gone, & yet their King somehow holds them together.

Somehow he makes it so the night passes more blurrily & they hang together. By the next morning, they don't really remember much of what happened, & I think to myself, having been through a night of my own, *sometimes I could use a little bit of that blurry not-remembering-so-well-next-morning stuff. But only sometimes.*

* * * * *

I'm descending a complicated series of ladders & stairs, among many people, continuously climbing down. I feel as I'm descending like it's not just space but time, I'm descending through places & people I've known & haven't known, times that still remain strange to me though I lived in them, through them, in spite of them. I think of people I knew, that I knew so closely, yes, yes, no, maybe. That's all you get at best. Then there are people I remember that become different to me over time. It's like who they are in my mind now is based on someone they once were, & who they actually are somewhere out there on the planet doesn't really matter anymore because they operate in my mind in a different way, they become a kind of a symbol of something, become tied to something, tied to a feeling, or tied to a memory, tied to something, like a mascot. Like you were once my friend & now you're Cap'n Crunch. Now you're my mascot for regret, for youth, for fun, for foolishness. And I keep descending this series of ladders & stairs & I feel my limbs fall away from me & not really important anymore in this descent. This descent is not into a physical place. This descent is through dream, somewhere else. The faces fall away, as faces do, & other faces come, & they go too. If I'm lucky, as I fall away completely, I will look beyond the faces & see the rest of this wide, wide world.

* * * * *

Those Crazy Days Back When I Was a Spy

When I think back on those crazy days, back when I was a spy, there were some funny moments, in amidst the bloodshed & mayhem. There was one I still like to tell about. We had an operation going on in a hotel room. It was a big hotel room, big as an apartment.

My partner & I were trying to tease something from the air, expose it. He'd brought in this heavy suitcase for our work. It was one of those bulletproof kinds. You could drop it from a hundred floors up & it'd be fine, wouldn't break or open up. You had to use the right thumbprint, & tumbler combination, & maybe a couple of secret handshakes to get into that bugger but, once you got into it, that's what you got. Bugs. In cans, & jars, & containers, all sorts of insects. Ants, praying mantises, hummingbirds, etc., etc.

I was unclear at first why we brought them in to set them loose, & then my partner took out from the suitcase what he called the Football. The Football was this football-shaped light &, when we set it up on a table, the bugs would gravitate towards it. The closer they got to it, the more likely it was they were going to evaporate. They'd evaporate.

Well, I wasn't sure what all this was about, because it just seemed like it was a lot of trouble for a bug zapper. My partner assured me this was no ordinary bug zapper, or zapper of any kind. *You see*, he told me, blue-sometimes-green eye glinting, mushroom eye glinting too, *what's important is not the ones that evaporate but the ones that don't. Because, when they don't, it's like it's some kind of signal, like in their buggy little minds it's time to hurry home.*

I didn't know what *hurry home* meant, or why it was important, but this is what we wanted to do. We wanted them to approach the Football, & then the ones that didn't get zapped to hurry home. Now the problem with this was that we had to let them out of the hotel room for them to hurry home, & follow them, & this part of the operation went south pretty quickly because they're insects, they go fast, & these were super-hyper-intelligent alien insects to boot. But I don't think we our technologies were really prepared to follow these super-hyper-intelligent alien insects back to wherever *home* was.

And so, ultimately, I just sat at the hotel bar a lot until the operation was declared over, & there was a red-haired waitress there who kept my drink filled. I was just watching the news, the same political things comin' & goin' as ever. Saw some pretty shady characters in the hotel, too, comin' & goin'.

I noticed that some of them were a little overly dressed for the summer heat that was happening outside. Some of them passed through the lobby in long coats, big hats. Sometimes their antennae poked out, sometimes tails from under their coats, sometimes they made a *buzzzzzzzz zzzzzz zzzzzzzz* noise as they passed.

* * * * *

It Was a Very Strange Year

It was a very strange year indeed. I found myself often walking through a series of old factory buildings. It became my regular path. Between the buildings were these wide, wide alleys, dark, & I couldn't tell if they were filled with trash, or if people were living there, or something else stranger still was going on.

I'd always get to a certain point in this walk, or *perambulation*, as one of my stranger friends would call it, where I just had to go to the bathroom. There, over to my left, sort of embedded in one of these old factory buildings, was a red door. Next to the red door was a blacked-out window, but it had a neon sign in it to tell you what was going on. It said **Bar**.

So I'd go over to **Bar**, & it took me a few times to remember that you didn't just push the door open at **Bar**—you had to kick at the bottom twice, & push high immediately, to get the door open. Otherwise it wouldn't no matter what you did, because it was only that combination that worked. I can't tell you how I learned it, but somehow I did. Maybe someone showed it to me. *Who knows?*

Anyway I'd go in, & the bar would be over to the left, & over to the right would be a bathroom stall. Not a bathroom, just a stall. Just a toilet surrounded by three flimsy walls & a door. And I'd go in, & close the door, & I reinforce it with the trash can that was there within the stall, since there was no lock, because inevitably someone would come banging against the door, wanting to use it, not recognizing that I was inside, not seeing my feet, not hearing my noises.

It was often this woman, she'd come pounding at the door, yelling *Fucking secret Moon mission!* & I'd hurry & I wouldn't finish. I'd just escape the whole thing & often, perhaps every time, I'd be attracted to what was going on at the back of the bar because, you see, there was no back wall, there was just sort of a murky inkiness that trailed off for as far as the eye could see, & further.

And I'd find myself walking into the murkiness &, sure enough, there would be another bathroom, or rather just another stall, but this time nobody else competed for its space. So I'd walk in, I'd close the door, & it actually had a lock. I'd close my eyes to calm, & I swear sometimes I thought I could hear the sounds of a TV show or a movie going on, distantly. Maybe a laugh or two. But I had to get

where I was going, so I regret to say I never walked deeper into the murkiness to see what it was. Lazy, cowardly? I don't know.

* * * * *

*Now this story started slow, those pages back there, so you could follow it really easily at the beginning,
but now it's going to twist, & it's going to turn, & I'm not saying you can't do it,
but I am saying maybe hang onto the rails a little bit more, just in case.*

* * * * *

I'm Sitting in a Sort of Coffee House

I'm sitting in a sort of coffee house in the Village. It runs back into its own murk for what seems like miles. And there's this turquoise-eyed girl I'm sweet on. Her name is Figga. I think I'm some other age. It might be younger, it might be older. It might just be some other kind of number. She's friendly but somewhat distant. I'm shy, don't know what to say. Probably I'm younger than I am now.

But I do my best, smile, talk about books, Mulronie & so on, & at some point she kind of smiles, & nods, & wanders away, & I see her go off with some pretty guy for a while. Then later she's back, her long red hair now tied up in a fake bob, & I don't remember what we're talking about. It all feels like loneliness & yearning. I'm helpless, but I try to remember back, *how did I get here?* Maybe that'll help me figure out where I am now & what's next.

I was on that green bus, the one that runs to the hospital, & I knew that most of the passengers on the green bus are not coming back tonight. It's the last green bus of the night. I got off it, not at the hospital, no, & I was walking the streets awhile, thinking about how a lot of them who stayed on the green bus were not coming back.

I was supposed to go to the hospital. The doctor said, *you just come on in, & we'll get you cleaned out & fix it all.* Then he added, *you could take your chance with the pills, maybe they'll help. Or you can heal on your own,* & he shrugged. So he really didn't know, & maybe he really didn't care. I'd had enough of that hospital. The crowded rooms, the quarreling roommates.

I cross the road toward this sort of coffee house, & I see the green bus in the distance, still heading to the hospital, going faster & faster. I know that driver; he won't stay on the street as he gets closer to the hospital. It takes hold of him, that feeling that most people he's driving are not coming back, it takes hold of him, & sometimes he'll drive off the road, into the ditch, & maybe he'll just stop for a moment for a minute & sit silently, his bus half-tipped in the ditch.

He remembers a dream he had, it was a long time ago, but it feels like it applies to nights like tonight, when I'm feeling like this—*We were all lost, & so we traveled to an alternative time, where the world had been healed of all its ills, & it felt good, & it felt hopeful*—, & so that's how I first came here, this sort of coffee house, it being one of the crossroads amongst the many kinds of worlds. But then something terrible happened.

There was a great explosion of some kind, & there's no more sort of coffee house, & I have this naked red girl, red-haired girl, in my arms. What I am saying is, she's burned but she's also red-haired, red-haired and red-skinned in my arms. And we're being pursued, & I'm looking for an escape, somewhere,

& finally I see it. I see that big house that I dreamed about all those years. Been awhile.

I remember there was an attic, & there were many mirrored rooms, & you could just lose yourself in those many-mirrored rooms. I carry her, red-skinned & red-haired, clumsily climbing the fold-down ladder up into the attic.

* * * * *

*Time isn't linear, no, it's like a big field, moments, places, people, events.
It's hard to believe this, & yet only to be able to point & say, **that's where it came from, back there,** but
not be able to point somewhere else & say, **that's where I'm bound, over there.***

* * * * *

He Was Known as Jack the Drug Dealer

He was known as Jack the Drug Dealer. He was a polite man, but he was in bad shape. Everybody knew it. The only hint you had of him from his older, better days was that paperback he carried around. *Unofficial Guide to Mulronie the Space Pirate's Universe*. You never saw him look at it, but you always got the feeling he just didn't have to, that he knew all its contents.

But then good luck came to him. He was sleeping in alleys, his only address a cavernous bookstore nearby that was kindly to him. Most of the time, if he ate at all, it was from the licorice roots found in a nearby park. But then good luck came to him, he won some money in some kind of contest, & grew confident, and he was now head of a charity organization, with ten nodes of business. He was on the top; his clothes were clean.

I was new on the job, & I heard this story about him in pieces over time. Then one day I got called into his office. It wasn't that big an office for the big head of a charity organization. I don't think he never quite left the alley in some way.

We ended up sitting on the floor together. He told me a story. He said, *there was this baseball game & I was in the outfield. They put me out there because they figured that was the place where I could do the least damage. **I was their mascot, because I won a contest with my friends.** People paid to see me stand in the outfield & wave to them. They were pretty good defensive team, so not many balls came out my way.*

*But then one time this ball was hit hard, I heard it, it was a **crack!** a beautiful sound, strange to say, & I think it's going to go over my head, but then it starts to arc low, & I start rushing toward it, & for a moment I forget that I'm no good at baseball, & I don't know why I'm here. I'm in the outfield because they have no use for me, just short of not having me at all. I just leap into it, my body arcs low, & the ball is curving low, & they are going to meet, my glove & this ball, & what happens is this: I squeeze my glove with my eyes closed &, by the single thread hanging off the ball, because it was hit so hard that it was kind of tattered, I catch it & hold it above the ground. I catch it cleanly.*

*Nobody realizes. They think I'd just kind of fumbled & jumped & fell my way toward near it somehow. And they were yelling at me to **throw to home plate!** because the monster that had hit this ball was going to get an inside-the-park home run off my sorry ass. But I raise the ball up, & I yell, **I caught it clean!** And then, just to convince them all, I hurl that ball toward home plate. It's a beautiful throw, straight on, arrives cleanly in the catcher's glove. I'm not capable of that throw, wasn't then, not now, not ever.*

*Later, someone asked me to autograph the inside of a milk carton. He said, **this carton's covered in signatures & statements by heroes, & you're one.** So I did. Now get out of my office. Get back to work, son.*

* * * * *

Civil War & Football

There's always these kinds of confusions between one thing & another. I'm sure you've been involved in a few yourselves. You see, this occurred during the Civil War & football. My squad is in the other side's war-torn territory, & we need to find some room for our kicker, when their soldiers rush at us & we shoot them down so he can kick the go-ahead field goal. And he does. He's very good, you see. Very good.

And now we're ahead, holding a slim lead. We then find ourselves in some kind of building. There are many of them as well. We're all getting food, it's like a cafeteria. *Is this like a timeout? Halftime?*

Now we're returning back to battle, & we get the word that Headquarters wants us to put on a big To-Do, & I am getting confused as to whether this is the Civil War & football, or possibly a Grand Production on the stage in the classic traditions of Vaudeville & Carnivale.

I find myself crawling over the stage, & people are waving at me in a confusion of lights, music, & noise. It just seems chaotic, & I'm trying to figure what's going on, when I fall through this stage, & I fall & fall & fall, until I land in the lounge of a kind of library in a very strange museum. I see in this lounge drawings of a red-haired girl that my friend Harry likes. He made them when they went to dinner. Told me with a shit-eaten grin that her name is Figga.

But then I blink twice, & they're not there, & I realize, *wow, this was one of those prognostications.* I saw pictures that haven't been made yet. And I turn to him, he's lying there on one of the other couches, passed out in between a boy & a girl, as is his preference. Ask him, *which one?* He'll say, every time, *Yes!*

I tell him about those drawings of that girl he really likes, & how they went out to dinner, & while they were at dinner he pulled out his sketchpad because he's very good, you see, he's very good. He drew a beautiful, elegant, sweet, lovely portrait of her, giving special attention to her turquoise eyes, & she squirmed about in her seat at the restaurant, wondering who else was watching, & many were, but she liked these drawings very much.

I get up & leave him to think about his life, his decisions. Walk along the vast murky room, & I think to myself, *isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to one another.*

* * * * *

Just Walking Through the Neighborhood

Houses & many trees, it's nighttime, & I'm lost. No phone to call anyone to pick me up. Then some fast figures appear, chasing, laughing wickedly, & they seem to herd me along, but they don't capture me. Then someone else they're herding along too despairs & gives in, allows capture, but then regrets it with a wowl.

But I don't, I just don't, & they herd me along, & eventually there's a green bus, & it doesn't seem to stop in this neighborhood. But I run for it, pound at its door, pound & pound it. It slows, & I get my fingers inside the door, & I yank it open just enough to squeeze in. I climb on, & I give the driver a dirty look, like *dare me to pay you, just dare me*.

The green bus rides strangely & bumpily out to the hospital, veering on purpose into a ditch at one point, the driver sitting there staring for a while, like his mind is shut off. But eventually it comes around again, & I make it home. Start to make up our bed, but it's a vast bed, & it's covered in papers that I push to one side to get the blankets better spread. They're from a manuscript I can't seem to organize into a proper book. I hate looking at these pages & feeling my failure. Mulronie waiting at the far end of the neighborhood, so patiently.

I'm singing to myself, after this hard strange night, that old song, *Goin' down the road, feelin' bad. Goin' down the road, feelin' bad. Goin' down the road, feelin' bad, feelin' bad, & I don't wanna be treated this-a way*. It's late now, & I'm thinking, *man, it'd be good to sleep*. I lie down, push the papers again to one side, but they seem to keep accumulating on the bed. *We lost so many, Mulronie. What do I do with the rest?*

* * * * *

Sunny, Sunny Days

You know those kind of sunny, sunny days. Oh yes, those kind of sunny, sunny days when you find yourself sitting in a patch of grass, maybe just a big old field, nothing going on in that big old field, nothing having to do with people & their mighty small concerns, no sir-ee. There's just grass growing, maybe a tree, insects, small animals, whatever else.

I find myself watching this insect pick its way along the grass. It's sort of shaped like a stick with legs. I can't even figure out where its head is. It's a very strange insect, & it puts me into a sort of reverie because I start remembering this red-haired girl I knew a long time ago. Her name was Figga. Strange name, eh? But Figga was her name, & I was in her house, & I was comin' down the basement stairs. I had this uncommon way of coming down these stairs. Halfway down, I sort of swung from them & sideways into the basement. Done it many times.

Well, OK, you might say, so how did you know Figga? Well, I think she was my neighbor, & I'd come over to her house to fix things. *And was she old or young?* Well, I'm not really sure. She kind of seemed like she was a little bit of both, & it seemed like everything that needed to be fixed was in her basement. I think that's where she kept broken things. I think she liked to keep all the things that didn't work or needed fixing in one place.

So I'd come in, & I'd be the fixer-guy, & I had no skills, & I didn't even have any tools. She bought me the tools at the local tool store, what they call in technical terms the *hardware store*. I'd come down, oh 'bout once a week, for a while, & I'd see what had broken & what she needed fixing. Sometimes it was something that had broken in her house, & sometimes she just found things out in the world that were broken, & she thought, *oh well, he'll fix them, he's good with the tools & the skills*. But I wasn't good at either the tools or the skills.

But what fascinated her about me was that I had once lived on a mythical Island out far, far in the Wide Wide Sea. It did not have any attachment to the roots of the earth. I'd gone out there when I was a

student. It was one of those exchange programs where I got to live for awhile and study on this Island.

But I must admit I wasn't very good at it because, although it was a very big Island, it wasn't actually even finished, & I used to find myself sort of floating at the edge of it with my notebooks, & sometimes they would float away from me, & that seemed far more important to me than anything else that was happening on this Island. In fact, I can't even tell you what was happening on this Island, or what I was supposed to be studying.

All I know was that I had a hard time keeping my stuff together & that really wasn't very much fun. But Figga, she just couldn't get enough of hearing that I had lived for awhile as a young student on a mythical Island. And then she'd hand me somethin' else to fix, her turquoise eyes twinkling, & the conversation would continue elsewhere.

* * * * *

In the Year 2402

This happened long ago, or far on from now, depending on your point in things. In the year 2402, or was it 24,002? I'm not sure of the details, but my love & I are in a house we share with another couple. We've been away but now are returning, & it's still new to us, even though it's an old house. There's still shelves to build, places on the walls for pictures. How can something be both new & old? Known & novel, *how?*

I leave the next morning, very early, to go to school, to try to catch up. I'm behind on my classes, & haven't paid for anything. And I think what happens is that I walk down the wrong hallway, & I arrive at the wrong school, & I get turned around, & I end up on the ceiling. But it's one of those places where you can walk on the ceiling, & walk on the floor, & everything kind of spins around, & time passes, & I come upon a girl who seems friendly enough, & I ask her what time it is. She says, *it's 1:30*. I want to ask her what year, but I just quietly despair.

* * * * *

That Strange Nada Theater

So this is what happens when you go to that strange Nada Theater, at that strange No-Tel, after midnight, well after midnight. You've seen more of **Remoteland** tonight, sure, it went on for hours, it seemed like for more hours than there are in a night. But now, if you can outlast the crowds such as they are, stay on & on in your seat, don't find some reason to leave or let someone persuade you it's time to go & have a malted at the local sugar emporium, you might get to the movie that comes on near dawn, pre-dawn they call it. You might get to see **More Fun**.

It's a strange world of **More Fun**. It's like our world but worse, if you can imagine that. No zombies, no vampires, no nuclear apocalypse. No, something happens, & people just start dying. They get weak, & never recover from this weakness. And what's funny, though not really, is that when the weak ones start to die, they sort of melt away, parts of them become invisible. Still there, but invisible. Then the invisible parts fade out completely. Some people call these poor unfortunate souls Melties.

Our hero, such as he is one, is the Postman. He finds a gun shop, & takes a few, & then he finds a grocery, & ransacks it for food. Then he leaves his known places behind, & eventually meets up with a



man called the Recruiter.

The Recruiter is rebuilding the population of the world by killing the Melties. He does it kind; they never see it coming. Often he spends a last night with them, sharing their meal, maybe singing their songs, letting them tell memories of what it used to be like. How it is now, maybe any hopes they have left. Kills them quickly in their sleep, buries them carefully somewhere peaceful. If he can't do it mercifully, then he parts them still breathing, still melting.

But his goal is for humans to finish the race, & then the world will carry on from there. He's good at finding people in holes & hideaways. He says to the Postman, the first night they are traveling together, *we just can't have human beings like Melties, who are more like hotel soap in a hot shower. We just can't have them.*

* * * * *

As You Travel Through the White Woods, Horizontally

You just wonder, as you travel through these White Woods horizontally, a sugar cube of LSD melting through you, allowing you to travel in this new & pleasurable way, you just wonder: *how it is that the Woods more welcomes you this way, horizontally? What is it about your human form that fits better this way?*

You come at last to the road that you didn't know was here, because there are no roads in the White Woods, & yet here is this road, passing through the White Woods, it's a simple paved road. *What does that mean?* And you're feeling for your horizontality, *but it's gone*. You're upright & walking again. Whatever that was, it's gone. It feels like you're walking on this road forever & ever, but never getting anywhere.

* * * * *

I Had This Lady Teacher

There's lots to say about when I was a student. Lots of crazy things, lots of subtle quiet things. Lots of things that I can't say too, like they were just of their time, of their moment. They weren't things that traveled through space & time to be tellable at some later time. They're just not; it's not possible.

I had this lady teacher at one point, & I go over to her house. I think she was having a party & I was invited. It was one of those parties where all the students show up, & the teachers, & everybody relaxes, calms down a bit. Not in the classroom right now, don't have to put on an act, not as a student or a teacher.

She was a good teacher, she taught history. I wasn't a very good history student because, at that time, I didn't understand that wherever you drop your coin in the stream of humanity, anywhere along it, by time or place, you're going to find most of the same things. They resemble each other way more than they don't. She tried to teach me that then, & I only learned it later on my own, sloppily. Took way too long.

I sat with her at this party, on the floor, in a corner out of the main action. I had the impression that she'd never eaten magic mushrooms before, & I offered her some from a paper bag I had with me. She took a look at the bag, peeked inside, pulled out one of the little curled bits to hold in her hand,

examine, sniff. She smiled. She was kind of an older lady, but not too old.

Then I told her I had something else too. I pulled from my pocket, in a rather debonair way, as though offering her a Cuban cigar, a really long blunt, & I started telling her about the times that I had lived in out West, in Seattle & Portland, how I'd go trippin' on Saturdays. I told her that I'd been poor & jobless & struggling then, & writing saved me on those tripping Saturdays, all those years ago. A black pen, a notebook of lined white sheets, a tab of Lucy, my Walkman & bag of rock-&-roll cassettes, & a green city to play through.

She looked at me curiously & said, *well, how old are you?*

And I said, *well, I'm 22, ma'am.*

And she said, *well, what years ago are you talking about?*

And I said, *well, truth be told, I'm talking about the future. Now if you want to take a few of those mushrooms & chew them on down, you might understand a little better what I'm saying. But it's OK if you don't.*

And she said, *well, so what was the craziest time you ever had out there, with those crazy Saturdays you're telling me about?*

And I said, *well, I don't know whether I am being a clown & entertaining you, like that guy on TV, or if you really care, but I'll tell you a story that didn't actually happen. It was more like a fantasia that I might have conjured up while hanging out in an alley one time. One of the homeless guys was saying to me, oh yeah, this was years ago, I was in the Woods, & there's women tied to the trees, all over the place. Now they weren't victims or kidnapped, nothin' like that, no. They liked it, they liked being tied up to the trees, & fucked that way too. It was really good, those nights, & there was nothing profound about it at all. So take that, you, Mr. Book Learning, you take that. It's the kind of reality that's out there for you to find.*

And so I told this story to the teacher, & she looked at me, smiling still, & said something I'll never forget. She said, *the key thing to being tied to a tree & fucked is that your hands are tied properly, not too tight, not too loose, & then when the man screws you, he positions your hips just right.*

And after that I knew, whether this lady ever had or ever would eat magic mushrooms, she'd always be OK in my book.

* * * * *

I Woke Up in the White Woods

I woke up in the White Woods, wasn't sure how I'd gotten there. I lied there on the Woodsy floor, trying to reach back in my mind, eyes closed, breathing calm, thinking. *How did I get here? Am I injured? No. I don't feel injured. Sore? A little.*

Lying here on the Woodsy floor for hours on end, sleeping or whatever it is I was doing, passed out maybe? *How did I get here?* Eventually, I find myself also sinking down below the Woodsy floor where I have been lying, below what's around me, below questions about injury & feeling.

I find myself traveling again through a city, with others, traveling together. I don't see their faces but we're walking close together, familiarly, there's a sort of complementariness to our pace, to the way we swing our arms & move our legs. Some of us are bigger, some are smaller, some walk naturally faster, some slower, but there's a familiarity to it.

At one point, we end up on a hill above the city & I'm just trying to figure it out. *What does this all mean*

to that me, who's lying a little bit sore on the Woodsy floor, there, over there? I can see you, over there, lying on that Woodsy floor. You can see me. Can you see me? Yes, I can see you, with those familiar people on that hill looking down on a city. How did we? I don't know. How did we? I don't know. Am I the past & you're the future, or vice versa? Did I go from city to Woods or Woods to city? I'm not sure. Are we happening together at the same time, on parallel tracks? Which one of me is lying alone, deep in the White Woods, & which one of me is on this hill, sitting among these dear people whose faces I can't quite see, looking down on the city, thinking almost everything is in sight?

* * * * *

Watch him build that world, watch him puff them out from his fingertips, look at that, look at that one, it's green & blue, look at that one, it's roiling with earthquakes, look at that one, it's a million suns in one, look at that one, look at that one, look at that one.

* * * * *

Walking into the White Woods

Walking into the White Woods & at first there seems no sign of people-folks. Their ways & things. And there's no paths, not a one, & I'm not bound for somewhere, so I'm not looking for a path. I'm not looking for anything. I look at the tree trunks, some of them smooth, some of them gnarled, branches in every direction, leaves of different colors, needles, the bushes below. Everything is almost still, there's just a bit of a wind, just a bit of something moving in addition to me.

And I suppose that makes me feel better because if it was completely still here, & I was the only one moving, the only entity, the only thing, I'd feel like I'm troubling the stillness, but the wind, if wind is sentient, if it is, if it isn't, it assures me that no, I move, other things move. Maybe things move that I can't even see.

And I come upon, & it's shocking, I come upon a man-made thing. It's hard to figure what it is. It's a long structure, sort of dilapidated, looks like it's been assembled over the course of decades or centuries. There's rust on some of it, looks reinforced in some places. I walk in, & it's like entering into a tunnel from that almost-stillness that I was in.

I see that many kinds of metal & wooden structures have been bolted, nailed, strapped, taped together, to form a tunnel & I wonder where it's going to bring me, if anywhere at all. And then I come to a kind of a brightly lit place, strangely colored but not disturbing. There's curvy seats that are sort of built into the wall, & the floors are soft, & the ceiling vague, almost kind of space-age.

I find my seat along the wall. It smoothes into me, gathers me in softly & firmly. There's a fireplace nearby, wasn't there just a moment ago, but there it is & it's not been started. I find my pencil & my little notebook, & I think maybe to scribble a word or two, but then I see that my thumb's nail is split & bloody, & it's going to be hard to write anything. I don't know whether to keep on, go back, or stay awhile.

* * * * *

What You're Gonna Do, & How You're Gonna Do It

It all comes down to what you're gonna do, & how you're gonna do it & that counts almost everywhere, in all types of situations. I was in the back of a Jeep, back where I come from. I was riding with an old friend, laughing, colorful. One of those guys you meet along the way that's just bigger than everybody else. Pays attention in a certain way, loves the music more, loves everything more. Wails pretty on his guitar till deep in the night becomes early in the morning.

And we ended up at a party, & there's another old friend of mine, & this one is from a *long* time ago. He's young, he's in his glories. His eyes are bright & his mind is alert & crazy & free, beautiful. I listen & I look. *Do it again, do it again.*

But then someone reminds me of something, & I realize that I left my bag of notebooks out in the Jeep, & so I have to go get them. So I leave the party, the sweet blunt smoke & the happy high music, James McGunn & such, & there's some girls, & they're even the friendly kind, though maybe not *too* friendly, but friendly enough, & there's food & everything. I feel welcomed, I feel alright, *something*.

I come out & where's that Jeep? That Jeep had my bag of notebooks in it, *Oh man, shit. Hey, where'd that Jeep go? Hey, you know those guys, you know the guy that drives that Jeep, where's he live? No, man, no, man, tell me. It's OK, I need to know.*

Yeah listen, can you give me a ride over there? Really, I left my bag of notebooks in the back of the guy's Jeep, & I'm not sure where he lives or where he works but, man, if we can just catch him it'd be all good. Can we do that, please? No, really, just give me a ride, it's just a bag of notebooks but it's important to me, it really is. Why'd I lose it? Why'd I lose it?

* * * * *

I'm in a Bookstore, Again, & I Have a Cold

Why am I in this bookstore again? I have a cold. Well, maybe it'll cheer me up, maybe it won't. I'm trying to find the books that I really want to read, ones full of music & high laughter, low despair, & cackling weirdness all around.

Buy one book, a paperback, & it's missing its first 70 pages. *What kind of bookstore is this?* Well, I guess that's not an easy question to answer. It ends in charts. Maybe those 70 pages would help you understand the charts, but *who knows what kind of paperback book this is?*

I keep moving in the bookstore, sometimes that's a good idea, you just keep moving. And there's a series of old, tall, grainy-looking hardbacks. I don't know, twenty, thirty volumes of them on this shelf in a row. Is it a complete set? I don't know. There's no titles on them. But I touch one, just to feel the age. I touch it very gently, & it thinks how long since it's been read. I touch the next one, & it's thinking of a funny joke someone told it, maybe the volume next to it told it a funny joke, that's my guess, I'm not really sure. All I can tell you is that as I touch them very lightly, I can hear their thoughts.

And I'm telling you, I'm going home to bed now. I'm going to sleep off this cold for a million hours, but that does not negate the fact that these books, they're living objects, wood impressed with words, *living objects*.

* * * * *

The Market Located Over the Buried Spaceship

When I was young, I worked at that market that was located over the buried spaceship. It was called Chief Seattle's Friendly Market, & I'd say it was pretty friendly, although when I started I didn't feel all that much friendliness from my co-workers. They didn't help me with all the strange cash registers I had to figure out, some of them ancient, some of them not so much.

They really didn't know who or what I was when I walked in the door that first day, still in high school, asking for a job. I was looking for a place to be that I could really care about, for some people that would remember my name from one time to the next. And it became that eventually, it took a while, I'll say that. Had to fight my way in. Maybe that's true of any situation that's already established. You're the new person, eager, wanting to join in.

It took at least a year for me to finally get down those long, dark stairs in the back, through the walk-in refrigerator, the crates of milk & juice jugs, other frozen items, push back the curtain, down that stairwell. Unlit & you descended & it seemed to get darker. Then, when you don't think it's possible, & you're thinking to turn back, even if you've been down there before, it starts to get a little lighter, & suddenly you're in this place that you didn't, couldn't, imagine existed, deep under the earth.

You're in a hallway, you arrive down into it. There's a ceiling, there's a floor, walls on either side, there's doors. It winds away, & there was this one time that my wanderings went a little too far in that buried spaceship, & I think I became disoriented, became dehydrated. I'm not really sure what it was.

But I will tell you that I remember indistinctly ending up in a room, not knowing how I'd gotten there, laying on a bed, the room was dark, & someone was feeding me the most delicious soup. I'd never tasted anything like it before, & I was being fed by a kindly, furred paw. And the paw fed me that soup, & sort of touched my nose & made a gesture, when I had eaten the good soup, *go back to sleep, it's OK*. As I faded, feeling safer than maybe ever, I felt the paws lift up my head gently, & pull a hat onto me. *A fisher hat?*

And eventually I woke up, & was able to make my way back, no problem. I wasn't nearly as far from the exit as I'd thought. But I remember that all these years later. It was unique among the many adventures I had down there in that buried spaceship. Never told this to anyone before tonight. It's not in any of the five Mulronie the Space Pirate books. Not even the secret sixth volume. But now you know.

* * * * *





Gregory Kelly

day 3 february 2009: psalm 40.

life has taken its turns its twists.
 its cliff diving driving fast around every corner out of curiosity for
 the single moment the steering wheel wouldn't hold the angled
 turns. the ocean a drop. houses stacked on houses high. i raced
 along the coast not following any line: a peculiar amalgamation,
 "coastline" implying a leveled footing, straight shot. it was not.

i have not followed a straight line any line
 i have not followed
 i have not
 i have
 i

i
 have
 cancer
 .

i remember my mind not thinking. like a metronome restrained
 while the last strike echoed steady same decibled strength. my
 body continued. muscle memory. my foot not governed boring
 holes in the drum of the car. the pedal flattened like a blade of
 grass. the car accelerated. steady. continuous. metronome. my
 hands letting the steering wheel pass through like a lost game
 of tug-of-war. guided by the pavement markings only ever as
 far as the headlight reach. i thought not what the next turn
 would hold. i thought not.

i
 held.
 nothing.

* * *

love.

love to such great extent that (to)love cannot be outdone.

it was a january much like this one. mild. snowless.

i remember the nervousness. the tremors. nothing large enough to register
the Richter scale. but continuous. like an engine that's been overused.
a road that has yet to be tucked in with the final layer of asphalt—smooth.

i remember wondering: could the neighboring passengers see? my hands
sh

a

k

e.i would concentrate—the paper cup of coffee never hit my lips.
they must have noticed. my body collided with its own unique turbulence.

i remember checking my satchel for the ringbox. it was there. a million
times over—there. i held it. my hands did not shake.

i remember that time s.l.o.w.e.d.

the m.o.m.e.n.t.

the wheels smoothed

the tarmac. s.l.o.w.e.d.

the queue to deplane. i gathered my belongings

s.l.o.w.

my concreteweighted footfalls like watching Finn learn to walk.

because once i was off that plane

because once i was in the immigration stalls

because once i rendered my passport

i

would

be(detained).

i remember the questioning. the fingerprinting. photographing. the

w

a

i

t.when my bags were taken. were searched.

i remember holding onto that ringbox toneverletgo.

i remember i cried

when they said: (go)i could go.

&i remember moving from ringbox to hertoneverletgo.

* * *

election day.

i grieve with a nation. not because one candidate won and the other lost.
i grieve not because one party triumphed over the other.

i grieve because i am human: and you are human: we are humanity (together).
but there is discord in that relationship. tangible discord. visible.
audible—the protest chants echoed between the coasts mixed with the
mockery from those who do not exercise their right to protest.

i grieve because of division. (we) (humanity) are divided.
we are not brother. we are not sister. mother. father. we are not.

i grieve because we are foe. but that is not how we were born.
we were not born to be on two sides of a fence.
that fence that has divided us so violently. so tumultuously. so recklessly.
that fence that has stopped me from seeing you and you from seeing me

. . . it must come down.

whether we scale that fence that wall.
or we take our fists to the boards and the brick.
the concrete and the glass and wire.
this dividing object is not impenetrable.

i grieve because we are not (together).

* * * * *





Prostate Panic

[Prose]

i. Crotch Attack

The protozoa crawled up into the doctor's vagina, and into my penis, with the excitement of checking into a Las Vegas hotel for vacation. Over the next 24 hours we swapped it back and forth with enthusiasm. Coming from the 105°F hot springs, this ruddy microbe must have considered us a resort spa at 98.6°F. Our thunderous seismic sex could not dislodge it, unaware as we were, of its newfound habitation.

I was depleted and disheveled by the stroke of midnight the following day. Slithering my wracked and wrenched body toward the door, I begged for deliverance. *Escape or die*, I thought. My 300-pound Loveline connection towered over me, looking piteously down at the withered weakling. Small rivulets of odoriferous fluid ran down her leg to the small of my back where her foot was firmly planted. In her authoritarian doctor's way, she wrote me out a prescription for a full blood workup, balancing the script pad on her moist knee, my spine feeling every pen stroke beneath. I suppose she intended to improve my stamina with this administration.

She deftly placed the script in my wallet as I gasped for breath, my hands fumbling desperately with the locked motel door. With a little chuckle to herself, her iron grip closed on my ankle, dragging me back to the queen-size bed, my fingernails frantically digging into the cheap carpet. My sobs for mercy went unheeded. Suspended in the air by the nape of my neck like a small kitten, she flung my trembling body back across the mattress for another 12 hours of Amazon abuse.

A week after this Internet date, back in my garret, nursing my bruises and abrasions, I got the call. In reckless youth, the "call" used to announce the beginning of new life, growing secretly in a woman's belly, but now, in this age of STD saturation, it is about fornication's fouler forms. She says she has become the equivalent of a hot ice cream dispenser. She is taking radioactive antibiotics, the kind used to kill biologic slimes in tropical aquariums. My similar prescription awaits me at the local pharmacy, she tells me.

I am surprised she has such stinking incontinence, as I only have an itch, an assumed artifact of my general poor hygiene. I pop the first glowing antibiotic pill, stopping by the local lab for the blood work. Might as well get all tuned up. I am already dialing in the next cyber honey.

Yes, so sorry, had to dump the doc. Her mouth ran like an audiotape of *Pathology Today* magazine. Frankly, I was bored numb. Then there was the fact that her thighs could be considered for statehood. Had to give her the Charlie-o-dectomy. A few of the usual outraged name-calling emails . . . then it's done. Praise Allah, no sobbing phone calls.

A week later, I go in to get the lab results. "Who's your doctor?" he asks.

"Casper the Friendly Ghost," I answer.

"Whaaaa?"

"Nobody. Have none."

"Then who is going to go over this with you?" he asks.

"I'm no moron. I can read this. The upper and lower limits are here in black and white."

"Go see a doctor," he says. He has the concerned brow and fleeting eyes that won't look directly at me. It's the look of "you're the next Christian into the gladiator ring." *Hmmm, what's the problem?*

Oh, here it is. Prostate-specific antigen. Number pegged. *What the hell is a prostate?* I thought that was what you do in front of graven images to heathen gods.

I go to a urologist picked at random from the phone book. Doctor Dickhead. He is all shaved off and sawed down. With his lab coat on, he looks like a polish sausage in a broken condom. Never met a guy more nervous to get out of the room. A completely claustrophobic consultation. He's darting from corner to corner like a mouse with a cat in pursuit. *Why don't they give the son-of-a-bitch some windows?*

He says nothing except, "Drop your drawers and bend over." The latex snap, then in and out in a flash. Thought I'd been raped by an ADD broom-stick. He says I need a biopsy. Make appointment, come back, pay \$300 at the front desk. I feel anally and economically abused, but I have no idea of the alien invasion coming.

I'm back for the biopsy in a week. A degrading affair on my knees with my ass wagging in the air. My virgin sphincter is invaded with an ultrasound probe the size of a cucumber. It has weird tools all over the end like you'd see in a fake alien abduction movie. It's all covered with lances, glittering tubes, and tiny lights. I think this is a scale model of a mine-boring machine he's stuffing up there. Twelve core samples are painfully taken, turning my aggrieved prostate into the Yucca Mountain tunnel complex. Hurts like a freeway auto wreck. Continues to hurt. Never stops hurting. Now I really do need a cure.

ii. *The Knowing*

The next three weeks are spent with wonderful family back east. Miles and miles of walking amid the pyramids of the capitol has me limping in groin pain. The perforated prostate oozing and growling somewhere in there. I stoically tell no one, preferring to suffer in silence rather than be the focus of a pity party.

I eat pomegranates constantly hoping to myself that this will cure me. Prostate pomegranates. Seeds and juice splash wildly in my cousin's kitchen producing crimson stains on every floor, counter, and rug within a 5-foot radius. Red everywhere. Intractable.

I am also deluging myself with tomato paste. I eat lots of crummy microwave pizzas made of English muffins: a one-inch layer of tomato goo and some mozzarella. The heartburn in my throat reaches a PH of 2.4. I am rapidly working my way towards the Guinness Book record for acid re-flux. I definitely don't want to look like that huge guy in the movie *Cocoon* who did the Zantac commercials. Either the tomatoes grow me new balls, or I burn out my larynx. Or this natural cure could make me the most virile bone boy in three states, but I wouldn't be able to talk about it.

Back to Doctor Dick. I wait for about a year in the little room, pacing, examining all the diagrams of prostates on the wall in detail, shuffling through the drawers, playing with tongue depressors and ear swabs. The hyper little guy finally comes in. Has the report. Big sigh. Bad sign. "You have prostate cancer."

There it is . . . the hammer. "Of the biopsies, 10% on the right side had class 4 cells." Here is the platform for six million questions. He rattles off the treatments like a waitress with a pie menu. My options:

- 1) *Split me open, reach in there and jerk it out, comes with excessive blood loss and near death;*
- 2) *Put radioactive pellets in me and see if I go Chernobyl;*
- 3) *Use leftover Reagan-era technology and see if they can focus a ray gun on me to fry it out. The treatment is more effective if I visualize myself as an incoming ICBM;*
- 4) *Do the cryogenic freezing on me. Stab a wand up my ass and crank open the frozen nitrogen valve. Besides getting a new address in a meat locker, it tends to freeze through walls everywhere and you wind up shitting out your dick. Might skip that plan.*

Doctor Dick recommends robotic surgery. Oh yeah sure, like I'm gonna let the Tin Man muck around in my guts when he cannot even stumble down the Yellow Brick Road. To a person who has grown up watching movies of jerky robots rampaging downtown Tokyo in the 1950s, this doesn't sound to good. I imagine the robots' revenge after their popularity was cut back in the sixties, & now is the time to rectify their ruined career by hacking me apart in a bad *ER* script.

But oh, everything is computerized, digitally enhanced, Doctor Dick assures me. The software has been tested on thousands. Yah, sure, so was Windows 2000. *Hello!* I've never met a computer that was not seething with viruses, freeze-ups, and locked loops. In a half an hour I'd be hollowed out, lungs gasping for breath on the floor. Here I am, the poorest son-of-a-bitch on the planet with my fate in the hands of Bill Gates.

Doctor Dick tells me that all these options come with a down side. Yeah, like getting hacked into confetti is not one. But it gets worse. After the "cure," your dick shrivels to half its size and you never get a boner again. All the cool goop you used to mess up your clothes with is gone.

Oh My God. I've been playing with that thing since I was 2, and with fevered intensity since I was 13. What kind of woman is going to want a guy with a dry and flaccid hose? I'll not be able to strut the stuff. *Unthinkable.*

Now the hard decision. Rubber dick or death. Hmmm, let's see. If I really poured on the coals, I might be able to have sex with a half a dozen beauties in two years, maybe more. I could be virility incarnate. But then, I would be dead. My kids would be mad at me.

But, come to think of it, I just did a sexual rampage the last few years. *When is enough enough?* Isn't what I really want a meaningful relationship with love and companionship? *Please pick up a gallon of milk on the way home, honey?* But how can I ever get that with a dead snake hanging limply from the bush? What ravishing intellectual beauty would compromise her charms for a poor poet with a dead Johnson? I either would have to be the cleverest literary linguist alive, or the richest Donald Trump on the West Coast. Probably both.

But hell, that ain't gonna happen. It's just me, a pissed-off 50-something with a megalomaniac style and over four billion useless facts as conversation starters and enders. So 30 years without a dick to enhance my intelligence, or two years to wallow in lust, drugs, and stupidity? Pretty hard choice. I can't stand this decision.

Damn. Where's the alternatives here? Where is the Sindbis virus research? The virus that comes from North African mosquito guts and eats cancer cells. Where is the immune cell cloning? Where's the iron micro-machine injections that go in and block feeder blood veins in tumors? Where's the ultra-sound extreme focus beams, the fungus that makes taxol? Why can't I get my prostrate injected with cannabis extract? I smoke enough of the chronic. What about the other dozen cancer drugs written up in the medical periodicals? Hell, where is even a prostate transplant? I'd rather have a boner than a heart or a new liver. Let's get our priorities straight.

Doctor Dick gives me a book to read and then come back with a suitcase of cash. Leave my pants at home. I stagger out stunned. All this time I thought I was in a *Star Trek* universe where magical beams were wafted over you, and you were cured with a glow of light. Now the reality is that I am in a bloody barnyard with Civil War field surgeons. Hacked limbs litter the ground. A gore-covered guy approaches me with a smeared 14-inch cleaver. A mangled chunk of lead is offered as a comfort to chew on for the impending amputation. *Fuck this!* Could I just start over, go back to age 16, and take some other branching time path?

iii. Information

Time for information. In this information pollution society, this is not hard to come by. I make a doctor appointment for a second opinion. Then a third opinion appointment, and a fourth opinion too. Find the Yahoo prostate cancer support group in cyberspace.

Damn . . . it's rough in there. I thought I had it bad—these sorry sons are dissolving seven

ways from Sunday. Some on their last gasp as the rot pins them to the ground; others limping around after surgery with their remaining fluids dribbling down their leg; still others recently diagnosed and confronted with the dozen methods of destroying the lower half of their body.

But the real information is all about the numbers. Numbers specialized just for penises. The Penis Surgery Association is not what PSA means. It's Prostate Specific Antigen, which is entirely unclear. Ultimately, this number is the tipping point of whether or not your guts get hauled onto the operating table. The Gleason Score (another deciding number) is not how funny Jackie is; it is an assay of how freaky your cancer cells are. Scores up to 6 can be treated with death rays; 7 to 8 can be hacked; over 8 and you're gonna die because cancer's likely running amok all over your body by then.

Similar story with the PSA. Up to about 15 you have a chance to be cured; beyond that, it's just maintenance until you get your floral arrangements in order. Some poor bastards have ignored that ache in the groin too long and have PSA numbers of 50 to 100. The doctors give them massive female hormones that eradicates all testosterone in them. They grow tits, get a squeaky voice, have to have a glass of wine every night, and get cranky all to hell three days out of the month. If I was a wife, I'd be trading one of those in for a hairier model. Who needs two shrews in the house? In a few years, the hormones are overrun anyway, and the body dies in front of *Oprah* re-runs with a half gallon of coffee-toffee ice cream in their lap.

iv. The Experts

Doctor Dick says that laparoscopic surgery is the best. For starters, they poke a tiny hole in you and inflate you with gas. The gas cuts off all the blood supply so the robot can hack around in the there while the doc watches on the big screen with a beer in his left hand. He refers me to a local Christian who has a higher survival rate with the robot, works out of Saint Salvage Memorial hospital. Doctor Hacken Chop.

I go to see Doctor Hack. He's a swarthy sort. Muscular and fit. When he wants me to drop the trousers and play in my asshole, I submit without hesitation. Don't want to get wrestled to the floor with some anal intent on this guy's mind.

Hack is a face person. Sits on a chair in front of me with his face four inches from mine. There is no personal space sacred to this guy. He goes over most of what I've heard before, but spells it out in more detail. About how the surgery would go down, the ugly early in the morning, firing up the robot, sobering up the anesthesiologist, the post-op care. He says he can spare the nerves that make erections, no problem. That was the big question. But then he says, "Why would you want to?"

"Whaaaa? Hello! Boners. Duhaaa!"

"But," he says, "the nerves go into the prostate and, if the cancer is inside there, it could be traveling on out through these ganglia, spread all over your body, and then you are dead and haven't finished paying the hospital bill."

"Spread?"

"The only way to be sure," he says, "is to take them both out. Remove a healthy margin around the prostate."

Jesus. First, limp dick for life, then a full gutting. Could you liposuction me too while you're in there? Reduce my BMI? Clearly this is a Samurai surgeon. A Seppuku master. Kamikaze cutter. Every thing in me is shriveling up and crowding back down behind the left butt cheek to try and get some distance from the Sukiyaki slasher. I'm slammed back in terror in the chair. He leans into me, cockeyed and closer, getting a few inches from my face.

"It's the only way to be sure. The only way to be cured." He whispers intently. I'm not so sure. The cure ain't sounding so good. Re-considering the hedonistic frenzy.

Exploring at greater length about the happy ass Gleason number, he breaks out the visual aids. The "score" is a composite of two numbers. The first is the most abundant cell type at the party, and the second is the next most prevalent. These two numbers added together make the "score."

Doc Hack has a picture of what cells 1 through 5 look like. Zero cells are all round and plump-looking; they exude health in a schoolgirl way, each with a little smiley face in it. The little blob gets progressively more ugly with extra unidentifiable crap in it and raggedy borders until, at 5, the worst condition, they look like high-speed bird shit on your windshield.

Inside are distorted Mr. Yuk kiddie sticker faces looking like mean vampire men with Hitler mustaches. These are killer cells. Their insidious tendrils reach menacingly out to pull themselves into your liver or lungs. If your most abundant cells and your runner-up cells are Mr. Yuk 5s, then your score is 10. No amount of amputation will save you.

At this stage of psychotic mutation, they have escaped the prostate “capsule,” and are now in your nodes, scaling up your spine, latching onto your liver. You better be writing a lengthy letter to God, because you’ll be standing before St. Peter before the month is out. If your numbers are 3 or less, such that the G score is 6 or less, you may be able to kill these renegades off with ray gun radiation, or by implanting a little piece left over from the Manhattan Project.

All the other options of freezing, frying, ultrasound, bad rock music, and the meat cleaver are still open to you also. But if you have bird shit cells that have not quite run down the window, you’ve got problems. A score of 7 is the grey zone. From here, you can be hacked successfully and live forever, but the radiation and other therapies will only knock it back temporarily. In five years or less, they’ll adapt to their spanking and the mutants will be back with a vengeance. Your score will rocket over 7, and you’ll be re-writing your will to include the bimbo.

My girlfriend takes me to her doctor who is a hypersexual freak. They have a torrid history of intense backroom sex when she worked as a “nurse” for him. I can see that he is a little jealous of the current arrangement. He tells me what the others say: get it hacked out in a hurry with some blunt instrument before it kills you. He looks at me like he wants to kill me.

Then to the expert of all experts. This doc deals with nothing but fucked up prostates. A millionaire over the deal. In a glass tower overlooking downtown Seattle, where he can see all the bowlegged minions below that have succumbed to his lacerations. His office doors are a carved mass of notches for each prostate kill. The whole place is filled with grinning nurses and secretaries . . . the death zone of macho.

I have to pay \$500 up front before the doc will even acknowledge that I’m there. I wait . . . and I wait . . . squirming deeper into the waiting room furniture. A crumpled, disease-covered *Newsweek* in my lap, shielding what little manhood I have left from the amputative thoughts around me.

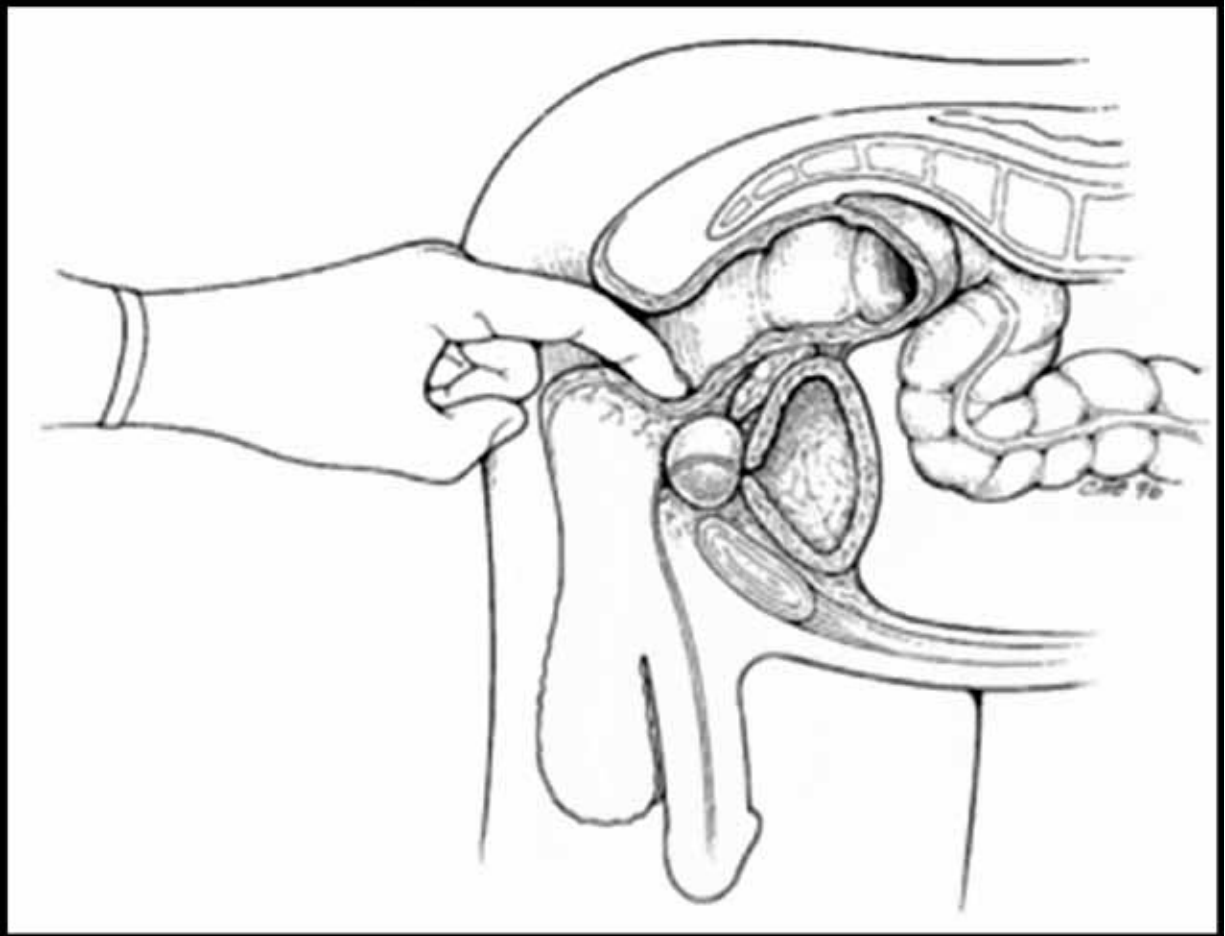
Finally, the gateway to his sanctum swings open as church doors do. A bright light bathes the background. The cleric carver stands poised in silhouette, his arms outstretched as the icon of Christ. Bathed in a cold sweat, my balls sucked up into my body, I walk towards the light.

In his office are strings of what look like prunes, arcing from corner to corner, similar to strung cranberries on a Christmas tree. Dried shrunken prostates, the surgical trophies of ten thousand eunuchs. I pull my pants down and bend over before he has to say anything. In the window’s reflection, here on the 30th floor, I see his glittering eye on my ass as he snaps on a rubber glove. All of Seattle need only look up to see my quivering posterior being mauled with enthusiasm.

Soon, sitting in consultation, as one ass cheek grips the edge of the chair, he lays it all out. It is much the same as the others, but it is the word of God coming from this guy. There is a cancer the size of a gumball in there. It has to come out or it will explode into my body and turn me into protoplasmic mass of spongy crawly meat that will eat the rest of my body. I’ll look pretty shitty in the casket. He can carve me up. He has a team of eviscerating elves that assist him. They have it so down pat, they can dice up three or four bodies in a day at under two hours each.

He says, “We’ll spare all the nerves you want. Whether or not cancer comes crawling back is anybody’s guess, but you can have boners in the meantime.”

Other than that, he has 20 different kinds of surgical implants he would be happy to imbed



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

in me that operate by manual pumping, batteries, or even a radio remote-controlled model for the girlfriend. She can inflate me at will, snickering as I waddle about the house knocking over lamps and snagging on door jambs.

The elevator ride out of there never felt so good—freefalling 300 feet helps my nuts off the ground. I just want to go look at a dirty magazine rack, go to a gun show, eat a huge steak, hang out with some construction workers, and make leering comments at passing young women. I want to get away from the sadistic sympathetic face of the girlfriend. “Oh I feel for you, I understand, it’s all going to be all right,” she says.

“*Bullshit it is! You don’t understand fuckall! My sex life is going to DIE! You think you understand that? Bullshit. All your junk is neatly tucked up out of harm’s way. You’d have to be amputated from the bellybutton down and still you’d have more stuff left over to play with than I do.*”

“Oh, it doesn’t really matter. I love you for who you are,” I’m told.

“Yeah, right, love me and the high school soccer team on the side. But I don’t blame you. I have no moral judgment. Get what you can when you can. Who knows what fate will ruin you in the blink of an eye. If the situation were reversed, I’d be taking a close look at the girls’ volleyball team.”

If you got it, flaunt it. Considering further, I sexually interpret the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*: “Make the most of what you yet may spend, before you too into dust descend.”

v. Insurance

Insurance is for the healthy. If you’re healthy, you have a job, and you pay. When you’re sick, you do not pay because you have no job. *Ergo*: only an insane corporation or a con man would insure a sick person. Therefore, if you are diagnosed with something, and you do not have insurance, you are toast. Crow bait. Not a prayer.

Instead of paying \$500 a month for medical insurance I do not use, \$250 a month for home insurance that the fire truck will never get to on time, \$200 a month for collision insurance on a truck that’s already crashed, vision money for eyes that never change, dental money for teeth that are doomed, life insurance for never dying, booster shots for pets that live wild—I decided to save my money. Put myself in the hands of fate. Trust in my own frontier ability to survive, or failing that, die. I’ll take my own responsibility for my life.

Calculating the economics by risk factor. I assume that I will only be in a car crash once every 20 years, and that will require 30 grand in bodily repair. With an insurance premium of \$500 a month, I pay \$30 grand every 5 years. If I go on the 30G-every-20-years plan, my monthly payment is \$125 a month rather than \$500. I have the option to die off and not pay the vampires anything.

Possibly I’ll beat the odds and not have another thing wrong with me till my last breath 50 years from now. If I develop another hideous cancer, I’ll go wander around in the Amazon basin until some little known asp bites my neck or some jungle medicine man with a bone in his nose, known as a Bujo, cures me for my wrist watch. I think that’s a reasonable medical plan.

The girlfriend howls that I have to get insurance. I say, “Oh sure. Like that’s gonna happen.” She Googles it up and finds 104,563 (sucker) deals for cancer insurance. She gets excited at the endless possibilities. Signs me up for 30 programs.

Then the phone starts to ring off the hook. These are very trained, very smooth sales cons born in the fires of telemarketing. Inspired by how easy it is, she gives out her credit card number to three hucksters for 200 bucks each. Tells me there’s nothing to worry about.

“OK, that’s nice of you to commit me to the three plans. What exactly were the benefits anyway?” I ask.

“What do you mean?”

“What the hell do they cover? The surgery? What?”

“Everything, they said.”

“Yeah, but what? The hospital, the post-op, the prescriptions? What?”

"It's OK. You're covered," she says.

"Yeah, but what the fuck? Are they sending you anything? How do you collect?"

"I don't know. They said they'd take care of it. Why are you getting so mad?"

"Because you just spent \$600 of my money for Jack Shit. Where's the web addresses?"

"It's OK. They'll email us," she says.

I crank up the computer to root around in the cyberspace vacuum. Something I had been trying to avoid. Digging through all the home page hype, I determine that these "companies" provide nothing, are underwritten by nobody, and only loosely promise to act as an advocate to the hospital to "probably" reduce your bill. This is a smooth-talked scam and she bought every utterance at the approximate rate of \$1.27 a word.

Frantically, I call them all back with \$37.82 worth of long-distance phone time. I can only cancel the program and get about a third of each deal credited back, the other two-thirds going to a "finder's fee" for the flim-flam operator.

All the other legitimate agencies burst out laughing at the thought of insuring someone with a pre-existing cancer. "Just how stupid do you think we are?" they say. They offer me a deal—pay \$700 a month for two years, and then they'll cover me for things that happen after that time, excluding any bills for the current causation or anything related to it. About as I expected. The plan then is to keep the \$30K bill and just hand over another \$16.8K for the thought that I might be insured—later! *Yeah, well how stupid do you think I am?*

vi. The Date

An immutable date is set. The date of annihilation of all that is familiar and known. It is a meteor hurtling on an unwavering collision course with Earth. This fact is known. The destruction will happen. The only question is which side will take the impact. Will we be obliterated instantaneously, or just live in nuclear winter, squabbling for a 10-year-old can of beans? I contemplate all the sin that has brought me to this butcher shop door. The smoking since I was 8, the endless fat in the diet, drinking to excess when feasible, drugs and lethargic living when possible. And *damn! I loved it.* Smoking is totally cool. Movie stars do it. The cinematic evidence is overwhelming.

I think of the four million times Mr. Camel has soothed my soul, made it possible to talk to the police or the wife without tearing them apart, and I thank you for that, Mr. Death Nicotine, Esq. So comforting you have been in my life when all others could care less. They didn't have the time or energy to deal with my pent-up angst, my "intensity" they called it. McNic was always there for me.

Even when stores closed and tendrils of my dopamine receptors screamed for satisfaction, my friend was never hard to find; bum one off some grumpy bus stop bastard, or dig through an ashtray, re-rolling the elixir of peace.

How many comforting clouds have I hidden behind to screen the questioning eyes of an unapproachable beauty? No other could have given me the strength and confidence that the born-to-my-blood friend has done. It was bonding to my estranged father, with whom conversation was impossible, but fill the corncob with the leaf of love and together we forge the relationship that a twisted society would not give us otherwise. *Thank you for that, Oh Thief of Youth.*

Then also, the wonderful torment of chemical withdrawals. How could I have experienced life in all its richness without an emotional roller coaster ride, seesawing between bliss and agony? From that tumult, great and insightful writings of rage, remorse, and romance poured from my cold turkey brain. Clinging to the edge of sanity, words to rival the angst of Hemingway, Dostoevsky, and Steinbeck became ink to be later lost in some dusty book case. *I must thank you for that, Oh Destroyer of Mediocrity.*

So was 45 years of camaraderie worth the death of sex in late life? Yeah . . . *hell yeah.* Sex was made for the young anyway, before a body becomes all flabby and creaky and dried. Now often just a political instrument between the sexes, lost in the alleys of age. It is but a distant memory. I try to

convince myself of this, knowing it is not true, knowing I still burn with desire.

Now wouldn't it be nice to have a dark cigar to have a soft sucking relationship with, to feel the sexy smoke in my lungs. To soothe away the fear of a hundred white coat people with the glittering sharp knives. Hell, the damage has been done, might as well soak myself in the hundred toxic byproducts of tobacco.

The girlfriend claims to be allergic to smoke. I know that's just a euphemism for being a whiny wimp with nothing better to snivel about. She burns incense all the time. I could make a case about the stench of incinerating camel crap. Maybe I'll just light up a cheroot and see if I can get her to break out in hives.

But then, late in evening, her second empty bottle of wine rolling on the floor, she lays there in her nakedness, inviting, entreating. My weak moral character overtakes me, these last days of fertility justifying my actions, and I slide between her clutching arms and loins, rolling in a reticent passion, releasing the fluids in groin-wrenching bliss. The fluids of the future miss.

vii. The Knife

My sister and I sit in the truck, the raindrops covering the window, each reflecting a mercury vapor star of the overhead light. Little shimmers of pale gray light speckle a landscape of black and shadows. The streetlight dully reflects on the dark wet parking lot. There in front of us is the back door to the hospital. Door 6. The one that goes straight to the knife. Silently, I reflect that these may be my last moments. The impending surgery . . . my miscalculated death. These raindrops are suddenly the most beautiful and important things in the world.

Into the unknown halls of industrial color, my sister waving behind me like I'm stepping on a cruise ship. This may be my last walk, down this hallway to Hell. Envisioning myself out of body. Looking down on the table, bloody rags strewn all around. Horizontal lines on all the monitors. The doctors pull off their masks and tap out a Marlboro cigarette, edging casually towards the door. My body is still, irreparable, ruined, dead. I know as I turn the hallway corner that life changes from here. Even if I live through this, things will never be the same.

A nurse leads me into an interior maze of glass-walled rooms. I feel like I am in an ant farm, awkwardly carrying my oversized food morsel between the panes, the 10-foot eye of some pimply kid staring at me. *Is he God? Where is God?*

Nurses all around me now, telling me to undress and put on the butt-wag gown. Soon I'm on the alien autopsy table. I know there are wheels down there somewhere for my last ride. My table height is just enough to see the other scurrying ants, each so intent on some mysterious duty.

There is a confusion over my EKG. Where is it? Had it done yesterday but there is no trace of it over here where they need it. Multiple calls to the other office; of course it's closed in this blackness of the pre-dawn. Is this impending laceration thwarted by bureaucratic confusion?

After a half a dozen attempts to contact the other realm, the nurses hook me up with a dozen sensors and a spaghetti of wires. Suddenly appearing in the doorway is a very bug-eyed, skinny, and highly nervous man, dressed in the doctor's white frock. Coming into the room, he shifts his weight from foot to foot as his body sways from some unseen wind. He looks like a nylon rope with two balls on top. His massive eyeglasses accentuate the vision.

"Hello. I'm Crisp Callahan your anesthesiologist. I came by to ask you if you had any questions."

Yeah, OK, I'm thinking: *do you always use your own body to test all the products on? What the hell's wrong with a fucking cup of coffee like the rest of the world? What's with the dusting of white powder around your nostrils? Can I see your ADHD card to explain why you talk so fast?*

But instead, I grumble something unintelligible as the nurses rip the electrodes off my chest with obvious pleasure. The rope guy throws a bag of clear gook on the table and says: "Give him 24ccs per deciliter of blood at a rate of 38 nanograms per quadraminasitvesculiaterates43.8aquadripoidspergorkian."

The nurse give him a blank stare, nods politely, and resume giggling and plucking my ripped-out chest hairs off the sensors. He spins on one foot, Gestapo style, and vanishes in a blur. I hope the hair bitches got that dose shit right, cause it's my ass they're plumbing with the crap. I want to know what Quadripoids per Gorkian are, but I just move sheepishly over to the autopsy table and let myself be strapped down. *Strapped down! Shit! They sure don't want me to escape now. They have a cash cow here. They must milk.*

A clomping in the doorway now. The giant thumb-shaped Doctor Hack is there in his tennis uniform. Guess he plans to swat my amputated balls around for a few sets.

"Hey! How you feeling?" He is loud and boisterous. That's about the stupidest question I ever heard. Umm . . . *like the fly in the spider's web? Like Doctor Mengala's practice specimen? How the hell am I supposed to answer that?* The nurses are cramming IVs into the backs of both my hands.

"Terrified," I choke out.

"Hoo. Nothing to be worried about. Do this all the time. You'll be back awake in no time, everything all done and over." He takes a few swipes at an invisible ball. Great, a jock Doc. Can't wait to hit one over the fence. He bellows some things to the nurses, then takes off at a jog down the hall. Yeah, might as well mix your calisthenics in with my surgery.

The nurses hang mystery bags on poles next to me. Fiddle with tiny hoses and tiny valves.

"Do you believe in God, son?" *Huh, what the fuck is that?* Craning my head around the fat ass of the nurse, there is a tiny Japanese guy with a white collar on. "Would you like a prayer?"

"Goddamn. Do I need a prayer?"

"You are in fine hands with Doctor Hack. He is one of the finest." OK, sure, that means a lot to me. I have a sudden urge to bury my head in the corpulent flesh of the fat nurse's ass. A yielding mass of pillow thighs and 40-pound cheeks. Comforting mother's softness to protect me from the impending knife.

"I don't believe in God. I'm an atheist. I don't even want God knowing what's going on here. You won't tell him, will you?"

"God is all-knowing, son." *Son? I'm not his fucking son. Do they always send him around to the death-bed jobs? The pre-hacks?*

The nurses crack the valves on the hoses. An amber fluid comes down the line and starts feeding into my body.

"God will be with you, whether you believe in him or not. He is all-merciful." Is that so? *Did you hear that from the Rwandans or the Somalis?* I must contend him with my dying breath.

"I believe in the five Forces. The wave . . . formation . . . the . . . sphere . . . all round the . . . spi . . . ral . . . Da"

A blink of wall and ceiling lights as I float along at 20 MPH, but only a blink. Then nothingness.

viii. Post-Op

Everything is white and fuzzy. A few lines, sharpening slowly. I find I can move my head, which moves everything else in a ship-lurch way. Sharpening still. I'm in a room. A hospital room, in a bed. This means I'm alive. I'm back from the other side. The nothingness. *What of the body? Do I have one?* Yes, there are legs.

But . . . all around the middle is piping, hoses, bandages. I'll worry about that crap later. For now, I'm alive. *What does this mean?* I made it through being dead, now I have to live. *What the fuck am I supposed to do with myself?* It's not enough to just be alive. We are not amoebas. We must do more than eat and defecate. Unless we do more, we cannot do the other two.

What to do, what to do? Am I not supposed to be having some epiphany? A post near-death-experience that awakens a glorious calling in a blaze of mental light? Some realization that my life has been selfish and vapid and that I will now benefit all humankind by . . . by . . . by what? Pay the bill? How trite. I suppose that will be the first thing. But now, just for now, I'll concentrate on pulling myself

back together.

No one is here. No family. No friends. Of course, I suppose you have to have a few, for them to show up. But where's the sister? She is the designated support group. Shopping, I suppose. That sale on LL Bean pullovers is a bit more important than the brother all plumbed up like an espresso machine. I mean, an LL Bean sale—how often does *that* happen? It would be irresponsible to miss it. She has her calling. Shop at all costs.

I wonder where she is all day. In the evening she comes in with the apparently retarded son. Dyslexic, she calls him. Pathetic is more accurate. They melt into the chairs like Home Depot employees on break. Say nothing really. Waiting for me to entertain them. I always do. I'm thinking maybe I'd like to be entertained. The nurse comes in and changes out the piss bag and mucks around in the reddened bandages.

The sister leans in to the view, trying to glimpse the car wreck from the freeway. Soon she retreats back to the chair next to the "Tard," who says nothing, but he has an expectant look as though he knows something should be said.

A wrinkled look on her face, my sister says, "*Ewwwww*, you have to piss in that bag? How often does it have to be changed?"

I can see she is thinking that she will have to care for me and change it.

"How the fuck should I know? Don't worry, I'll deal with my own piss."

"*Ewwwww*, that's good. Pretty gross. Do you have to change your own bandages?" Again thinking that she might get stuck with the job. "Those look pretty bad." I'm getting pretty angry now.

"Look, Goddamn it! I've been laying here for eight hours wondering where the fuck you were, more saturated with morphine than an Afghan poppy field. Then you come waltzing in and tell me that I'm all disgusting and nasty, and about how you hope you don't have to do any actual care. I had you come all of 9,000 miles to take care of me while they sliced me up like a Christmas ham, but all you do is try to avoid me. Where the hell is a shred of sympathy, a joke or two? Why can't you read me an article? Talk to me about something interesting? Comfort me in some way instead of dissing me for being a nasty pile of goo?" I am getting very loud. The nurse is poking her head in the door, wondering if she should rush in and sedate me.

The sister retaliates in an 82-Hertz whine. "*Ewwwww*, why do you always have to pick on *meeee*? I just came here to *see* how you were doing. I always try, but *eeverybody* just tells me I'm shit. *Noooo* body *eeever* appreciates what I do for them. *Uunh, hunhu, hunhu*."

The warming up of a fake tear show. I've seen this act all my life. Ain't playing into it.

"Well ya could have come by earlier just to see if I was fucking *alive*! You come in here, dissing the shit outta me for being a hack job, and all you can think about is if you gotta touch my piss bag. Well, I'm sorry. I can't do a thing about being all nasty and messy. So . . . if you don't like it, *fuck you!* *Get the fuck outta here!*"

"*Nooobody* appreciates what I try to do for them. *Ahuna, unhuna*. Why does everyone have to pick on *meeee*?"

"And take the moron Tard with you. Can't you beat it with a stick and get it to do something other than stare slack-jawed?"

"Uhhh, uhh, I talk, Uhhh," the Tard whispers.

"I'm trying to *recuperate here!* I *don't* need this *stress!*" The nurse comes bustling in, sees that I'm halfway out of the bed, blood red, straining every muscle.

"You have to leave. You must leave now. He needs to relax, get some rest. Please leave." They suck out of the chairs like water being vacuumed off linoleum. The sister glowering at me for the affront of doubting her deep empathy and perfection. I collapse back into the bed.

Find the red button that's supposed to inject me with more morphine. My torso feels like a bridge fell on it. I know there is wreckage down there, girders sticking out everywhere, wiring all shorted and sparking. I hammer the button 5 to 6 times, only getting a stupid click out of the thing.

Where's the junkie rush? I contemplate this briefly, still seething from the selfish sister. I'm out cold in two minutes.

The next day the sister and her appendage bring me flowers. Pedestrian flowers, whatever was the cheapest next to the Safeway check-out line. But they are nice next to me on the window sill, little fun daisies. Remembrances of when the days were warm and sunny. The sister entertains me this late morn with complaints about the dirtbag motel. Called something like the High Desert Inn.

"This will not do," she snivels. "Cinder block walls, the water tastes funny so the Tard won't brush his teeth. Everything kind of 1950s." Says she got it "so I could be close to you in the hospital." Like that makes a difference for the half-hour-a-day visits. Now she has to move to the Sheraton tonight and spend \$50 more a night, just so she can feel civilized. She tells me of all the different malls she's found, driving my truck all around town.

The Tard says nothing. He is not really retarded, just an extreme case of failure to thrive. Has lived all his life with his face planted on a cathode ray tube, TV, Game Boy, computer seek-and-destroy games. Everything is handed to him, everything except books. He's eighteen and illiterate. Huge too, a good 260 pounds and 6-foot-3. A gigantic blubbery baby.

But just as expressionless as a cream pie. Has the animation of mashed potatoes. Says nothing, has no opinions. Is out of sorts just now, in the chair, no Game Boy to sink his face into the warm glow of cyber unreality. I suggest that he blow up some rubber gloves and make a finger sculpture, but he barely grunts and flashes his terrified eyes at me that he might have to *do* something. He sits, holding this part of the building from hurtling into space on some alternate reality tangentialism.

These two are boring the shit outta me. I'd rather talk about Nubian fecal matter than malls. I ask the sister if it isn't maybe feeding time for the big Tard. They must have to process at least 20 pounds of burgers and fries through that thing every day. At \$4.50 for 2 pounds of high fat feed, that's \$45 a day. Its metabolism is so slow, though, being predominantly a seat warmer. I can't imagine what the bill would be if it exercised. I'd just starve the creature if it were mine. Starve it till it figured out how to talk and hustle its own food.

Within an hour of arrival, they leave. Off to find some size 56 Calvin Kline underwear for the big thing. The nurse helps me out of bed to take a stroll in the halls. I have an artificial Christmas tree of crap on wheels to push around. It is decorated with an IV drip, piss bag, little computer boxes that have lights and make beepy sounds. I shuffle up and down the halls, pushing the Christmas tree, peering into the other rooms, looking at the human devastation within. Morbid voyeurism. I'm chopped up but, the difference is, I'm getting better. The death inside me is hacked out. Now, with every step, I get stronger, closer to resuming a life outside of here.

For them, they appear to have moved in. This is their home till the reaper takes their soul over to the other side. For them, there are no walks. No hope of leaving. Sad though it is, their people clustered around their feebleness in the bed, it is uplifting to me. I am not like them. I'm gonna fix myself and never come back to a death house like this again. If I am mortally sick or wounded, I'm gonna go die in the woods like an animal should. The soul of the earth merging with mine, the last sounds I hear are of the insects and the fluttering birds. Not the beeping of a computer with a low blood pressure reading, the clanging and scurrying of nurses, the groans of the dying down the hall. No, if I die again, I will breathe my last in the river of nature's energy.

Over the next few days, I walk more and more. A half a dozen strolls of a half hour or so, up and down halls. Sometimes riding the elevator to different floors and walking around them. I streamline all the crap on the Christmas tree, eventually unhooking myself from it entirely and hiding the piss bag under my third robe to cover the waggy butt thing. Most people are way more trashed than me, again making me feel superior and better. A few young guys with industrial accidents, a worried wife and child beside them, but mostly partially fossilized people on their way out. The sister accompanies me once every few days. She is nervous and distracted. Not much fun. I feel I have to take care of her, her equanimity.

The head nurse on the floor is a rotund exuberant grinning woman. She says she loves to get us prostate hack cases in here. Can't exactly remember why she thinks that, maybe to teach us how to accept our fate? She says that her husband had the exact same thing from the same robot.

"Ask me anything," she says. OK, I have no qualms about stretching the limits of candid correctness to the edge.

"Well, does he ever get boners anymore?"

"On very rare occasions. And then it doesn't stay."

"Well, don't you work him up?"

"Of course I do. I go at him full blown, so to speak. But as soon as I stop, he goes to jelly."

"Well, why is that? Doesn't he want to do the wild thing?"

"*Nooo*, I don't think so. He seems to have sort of lost interest."

"How is that possible? Was he a sexy boner type before?"

"*Nooo*. He's never really been the sexy type."

"But you say that he can get a stiffy sometimes?"

"Yeah. But he has to be really excited."

"Well, then. I think there's hope for me. I've always been the horniest boner boy in 16 nearby states. What do ya think? Is there a possibility I may recover full function?" She is squirming around in her uniform, rotating her hips involuntarily and thrusting her huge matronly breasts out with every other breath.

"Yes. There's a good chance. But you never know." She has an ear-to-ear grin.

"If I may ask then, just how good *is* your sex life? Do you use various things to assist you to attain pleasure?"

"Well . . ." She is dedicated to keeping up with the candor, although blushing wildly at this point. "On a scale of 1 to 10, I'd say things were about a 4. No, we don't use any . . . toys."

She's almost beet red now. Yeah . . . like I believe that last. "Let's just say, we use our hands a lot!" For emphasis, she stretches into the latex gloves and lifts the blankets off my crotch. I'm wishing I could have a huge boner to stare her back at her. The one-eyed face-off. Impale her blubbery torso with it; show her what a sex maniac can do with a frustrated woman.

But I am in fantasyland. My cock is shriveled to the size of a dime and about as long as 10 cents is thick. It is terrified into minuscule by its recent murderous mugging. I want to ask more about swing sets, wetsuits, and lubricants, my sexually excited mind going into perversion overdrive, but I sense the conversation is over and it's back to the business of bandages.

Day four. I'm more than ready to get the fuck outta here. I feel fine. Get me the hell and gone before I catch the death of some crap that kills me. Let me go home to my cat. No. I can't go. I can't go till I can go. There is no release until I shit. Apparently, the abdominal surgery freaks out all the nerves, puts the duodenum into paralysis. *Merde*. I order huge meals from the kitchen. Burger, fries, chef's salad, side of oatmeal, four coffees (which they don't bring), ubiquitous hospital Jello with mystery things suspended in it. Stuff myself. Figure it will all push out the other side and I can get outta here.

How are they gonna verify this? Do I need to show off the turd when it is birthed? I recall the guy who crapped the perfect replica of the Virgin Mary. The miracle was viewed by thousands making the pilgrimage from all over the world. Guy had a pretty good thing going for a while before some absent-minded idolater flushed the miracle in a moment of habit.

So I try. Sit on the idol maker throne for hours. Can't strain because my guts are fragilely sewn together inside and out. Must sit and wait for the stool spirit to move mountains. "Move the mail," as my sister calls it. She is trying to be concerned and asks me all about this. But guess what? I don't want to talk about my asshole. She tells me about her household obsession with weight loss. Everybody weighs in five times a day. Weigh in the morning, the evening, after walking. Weigh after eating.

Then there's the true crappy confession—they weigh themselves after defecating. I am so

fascinated. Yes, they drop a few pounds. I am so thrilled and amazed. The issue here is to move an ounce so I can go home. I have a stack of empty prune juice containers between the bed and the wall. Every 15 minutes I slurp down another. Nasty fluid. Like boiled copper. Nothing is happening. I am wearing a hole in the hall carpet hiking up and down the length of the building. Nothing. Guts locked. Finally, at the end of the day, I expel a vast fart. My hearty contribution to global warming. I triumphantly tell the nurse. *All is well, let me the hell outta here.* “You think I’m gonna let you outta here with one teenie little fart? You got another think coming to you, boy. You’re gonna have to do a *lot* better than that!”

“Oh no. *Oh God, no. Let me go.* I am just wasting money and time here. Think how much more efficient it would be to load this bed with a fresh nutless bastard. *Let me goooo pleeezze!*”

“We’ll see what the doctor says in the morning.”

Next morning, up early, walking, trying to shit. Frantic to succeed before the doc visits in the late morn. Stretching my gut. Can feel the strain against the sew job. No luck. Nothing happens. No neural connection. No mail moved. The doc comes and goes in a blur of crisp questions. No release from this medical hell. Stuck here another 24 hours, minimum.

The longer I’m here, the more uptight I get. The more uptight I get, the more the mail is stuck in Toledo. I must be cementing the Rock of Gibraltar in there. They’ll have to cut it out. I remember a litter of household kittens. One was born without an asshole. The poor thing just got bigger and bigger. I thought it would pop, blowing kitty shit to the four walls, but it just kept swelling. Poor thing. Finally died in the second week having never expelled. I think now that *this is my fate.*

Terrified, I stop ordering food. No food now. Just gallons of prune juice. *The mail must move.* More gas over the course of the night. I am so hopeful. Never thought my life would be dictated by a toilet seat. It has been six days without any movement, since before I came in here. I have stuffed in about a cubic yard of food. *Where the hell did it go?*

The next day, the doctor releases me, even though it would not be for another two days and 40 bran muffins later that the dam unplugs. Finally, on the comfort of my outhouse throne, the wild cool wind all around me, stars as my lights above, the gut gives up. The obsession with what is so normally ordinary is over. Peace, regularity, healing. *Thanks-be unto the sacred scatological gods.*

The day, the time has come. I am being wheeled out of the goddamned hospital. At the threshold of the doorway, they jerk me forward and snatch the chair out from under me. It is cold and raining outside, but I am happy to see it in all its grey splendor. We cross the parking lot with me shuffling along. We clamber into the truck with the giant baby taking up more than half the seat space.

My sister tries to start the truck. Nothing. Dead. She has left the lights on. She begins to wheedle and wail about how sorry she is. *How she never meant this to happen. How could it happen to her now? Why is the world not fair to her?*

Jesus Christ, it’s just a dead battery. She says she’ll go get help, jumps out of the truck and disappears. The huge Tard and I wait. He doesn’t even move over to give my abdominal trauma a little more room. Just stares straight ahead. Afraid of everything. The sister stays gone. The rain is dribbling down. She’s likely getting a double shot latte with soy milk and cinnamon sprinkles. Trying to keep her hair dry.

I tell the Tard there are jumper cables in the back. That we should jump the truck. No response. No movement. Probably has no idea what I’m talking about. I get out and stretch my guts to reach into the back to get the jumper cables. Tard sits in the truck.

“Pop the hood, will ya?” I yell at him. No movement.

“Ya hear me? Open the hood!” He gropes around a bit, but nothing happens. I open the driver’s door and pull the hood release.

“Help me get a jump, will ya?” No response. A blank stare.

“Get the fuck out of the truck.” I emphatically say. He scrambles out of the passenger side and stands there next to the truck, bewildered, scared. “Ask people driving by if we can get a jump.”

“Huh?” I go up to a SUV powered by a confused woman.

"Can we get a jump for our battery, Ma'am? Sure would appreciate it."

"Yes, of course." She labors with the lever to open the hood. Finally it pops open a bit. The Tard just stands there in front of it.

"Open the hood. *The hood.*" He pulls up on the thing, still hung by the secondary safety catch. After a couple of minutes, I come over and release the second latch.

"We need to move the truck closer. Can't you see that?"

"Huh?" I start to push the truck in the parking lot. It is resistant to my efforts, but slowly moves. The Tard is standing there gape-jawed, staring at me. I can feel the blood weeping out of the holes in me, the insides of my guts pulling apart.

"Ya fucking moron! Help push the damn truck. What the fuck are you doing standing there?"

"Huh?"

"Get the fuck in front of the truck and use your flabby ass tonnage to push this fucker while I steer." The giant finally applies himself out of fear of my wrath. The truck inches across the lot to the SUV. The fool doesn't realize that it will crash into the SUV. I have to crawl in and stomp the break at the last second. With my foot on the brake, the Tard continues to push.

"Hook up the cables so we can charge." This new directive stops him from pushing, but returns him to paralysis. How can he not know how to jump a car at 18? I had hot-wired and stolen 3 cars by 15, jumped thousands by 18.

I get out again, wincing in pain, my shirt now saturating in blood, and hook the two electrical systems together. I stand there in the rain, waiting for the battery to charge up. After a few minutes I yell to the Tard, "OK. Start it up."

He has climbed back into the truck to stay dry. He moves over to the steering wheel, but does not do anything. He is frozen with indecision and fear.

"Turn the key. The key!" Nothing happens.

I come around to the driver's side. "Get your lard ass *the fuck over!*"

I start the truck. Get out. Remove the jumper cables. Close the hood on the SUV. Close the hood on the truck. Thank the lady profusely for being patient and helping us. Put the jumper cables back in my truck.

Clamber painfully back into the driver's seat. I feel sick. I see the piss bag on my leg is crimson with blood. My shirt sticks to the gore leaking out of my belly.

The moron Tard is staring straight ahead, saying nothing. Not apologizing, not asking how I am, nothing. Brain dead. I pull around to the front of the hospital, and my sister comes out with the proverbial coffee cup, its sipping lid steaming lightly.

She tells me: "Oh, I've been looking everywhere for help. I finally got security to come by with a battery charger. Don't know what's taking him so long. He should be here any minute. I'm so glad he could help us. Isn't that good?"

"Your son and I got it going. Would you mind driving?"

"*Ohhh* . . . well . . . OK," she says, petulantly putting her coffee cup in the holder. The poor woman has to do everything.

Her hair is perfect and bone dry. I am soaked in rain and blood, chilled to the bone. I squeeze into the other side, mashed against the door by the towering Tard. My sister pulls out into traffic, and gets in the fast lane. The one that will take 10 miles to make a U-turn out of, so we can then head in the correct direction home.

To be continued in Cenacle | 100 | June 2017

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Tom Sheehan



A Lost Face and Then Some

When asked to read to celebrate my new book of memoirs,
I let the audience enter the cubicle from where the work came.
I told them: I'll celebrate with you by telling you what I know,
how it is with me, what I am, what has made me this way;
a public posture of a private life near nine decades deep.

Just behind the retina, a small way back, is a little room.
with secret doors, passageways, key words besides Sesame.
If you're lucky enough to get inside that room, at the right time,
there's ignition, a flare, now and then pure incandescence,
a white phosphorous shell detonating ideas and imagery.

It's the core room of memories, holding everything
I've ever known, seen, felt, spurting with energy.
Shadowy, intermittent presences we usually know
are microscope-beset, become most immediate.
For glorious moments, splendid people rush back

into our lives with their baggage, Silver Streak unloaded,
Boston's old South Station alive, bursting seams.
At times I've been lucky, white phosphorescently lucky;
when I apprehend all, quadrangle of Camp Drake in Japan
in February of 1951, the touch and temperature of the breeze

on the back of my neck; I know a rifle's weight on a web
strap on my shoulder, awed knowledge of a ponderous
steel helmet, tight lace on a boot, watch band on one wrist.
Behind me, John Salazer is a comrade with two brothers
not yet home from World War II, who the captain calls

and says, "You go home tomorrow. Be off the hill before dark."
 "No, sir, I'll spend the night with Jack down in the listening post."
 At darkness a Chinese infiltrator hurls a grenade into their bunker.
 The count begins again, eternal count, odds maker at work,
 clash of destinies. On the ship heading home, on a troop train

rushing across America, in all rooms of sleep since then,
 are spaces around me. Memory, fragile, becomes tenacious,
 but honors me as a voice, and my will to spread their tenacity.
 My book says, "For those who passed through Saugus, all towns,
 comrades bravely walked away from home to fall elsewhere,

and the frailest one of all, frightened, glassy-eyed, knowing
 he is hapless, one foot onto D-Day soil or South Pacific beach
 and going down, but not to be forgotten, not ever here."
 I had their attention. We shared: The shells were cannonading
 as one died in my arms, blood setting sun down. In darkness now

I cannot find his face again. I search for it, stumble, lose my way.
 November's rich again, exploding. Sixty-four Novembers burst
 the air. I inhale anew, leaves bomb me, sap is still, muttering
 of the Earth is mute. I remember all the Novembers; one tears
 about me now, but his face is lost. How can I find his face again?

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."*

—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

xiii. Leaves the Kingdom, Part 1

The morning of the day we left,
the day I left you, this new Kingdom,
what we built by chance & will &
want, I woke still deep night
tangled up, in three dreams, each
the kind that forgets all else whilst living.

In the first, I watch the slave boy
fall asleep new new light, waiting
his new master, war over. Him gathered
like the travel bags with the whisper-pink
cockatoo, the golden chamber pot,
gaudy strand of Empire coins around his neck.

Holds a half-eaten orange vaguely in
his boney hands. Someone threw an
old cloak over him, missing his bare toes.
The bird peers curiously into the
empty chamber pot, considers the orange.

In the second, I am very old, tired &
spry both, painting in my studio,
every hour of the day. Moods of sun &
sky through my window as important
to me as the wear of my brushes,
mix of my paints.

The brushes I've used & no more.
The ones I use now.
Those yet to come.
Those I will never hold.

The canvas before me will outlast me,
in barn or museum.

All this work. These many years.
 What more? What else?
 I'm falling with the light.
 Till we rise again.

Wild near waking from this one but
 a cool wifely hand, & a calming breath
 of a word, & I am on a ship.

My ship? Some ship? And you have
 no face right now. Just a ruffled
 blue bonnet & a salmon-pink dress.
 Just an orange held lightly in your hand.

Long black stockings & black leather shoes.
 Dark bangs, & there's a live & trembling
 thing in your dress's pocket.

The way you float, not quite faced, bob
 just above your seat, rocking lightly
 on sea air, & the water slowly filling
 this ship arrives.

Letting the orange roll off your fingers,
 you lift up higher, & drift from me now.

Wake, nearly claw out of these dreams,
 though I know not who you are,
 who you several figures are?

Vaguely tongue among my teeth,
 especially the one whose cavity
 I awled for her safe passage. She's
 long not there. When did I lose you?
 When we brothers rode into this land?

I'd travelled with you so many years,
 & even after I found my brothers
 you remained. Rarer signalling me
 with your cackling noises, but when
 a danger near we missed, when a sight
 not to be neglected in these strange
 White Woods. The time you urged me
 to lead us up an unassuming ridge,
 & on a mile along. Toward night, tired, long
 past usual time for meal & rest.

Up a steep hill to a top-patch barely
to fit us all. I sat. We all did.
“Let’s watch.” Dusk became night &
the stars would not stop thickening
their numbers. Dreamwalker looked
at me & laughed. Francisco wondered
if we watched sea or sky, whose brush?

Then the stars altered. The whole sky did.
White lights on black canvas became
black on white. And back & forth.
A pattern. It was music. She *hmmm’d*
in my jaw & I followed, & the others
did too. We *hmmm’d* with the pattern
of the sky, it *hmmm’d* with us, all night.

They knew of you, knew of your kind,
though learning of you in my jaw
fascinated them. Young Odom showed
me a treasured coin purse of his own, said
she, one of her kind, lived sometimes
in this purse.

“Not always?”
Head down. “No. They come & go.”

Another night, camped in Woods far
from all others, again between one
clue of the Tangled Gate & another,
something in our campfire dinner
talk delighted you & you cackled
merrily from my jaw.

Roddy, or Asoyadonna, joined in,
big bright cackles. Soon the rest.
Unlike my friend in the secret
skies above our boat, I shared you
with them. We travelled together,
we lived this itinerant life to learn
how to protect you. Your kind in
these beautiful White Woods, &
what of good men & women there were
in this world.

Was it you led us, let me, back to
these old homelands of mine? I wonder.
After long silence, you began to direct me
with some frequency again, like old,
like when I was a fleeing youth from here.



Sleepless, taking overnight watch to sit & think,
 I am joined by Dreamwalker who listens
 as intently to my jaw as I do.

“To where?”

“I never know for sure.”

He looks at me steady. “We arrive soon.”

Not long after we were sat upon by
 the highwaymen that ruled these
 lands. They moved slowly, guts not
 tight, sword-play sloppy. We formed
 our circle & they foolishly moved in
 rather than cutting us down from a
 distance. Discovering us not the likes of
 fat coachmen & terrified travelers,
 their taste for fight wore out quick.

* * * * *

xiii. Leaves the Kingdom, Part 2

By morning, they'd realized we wouldn't
 kill them, nor release them to more
 marauding in this area. Defeated,
 they sought our forgiveness, even friendship.
 Promised a camp of good food &
 willing girls to compensate our troubles.

Herding a couple of dozen cowardly men
 back home was something we'd done
 before. What was different? What I saw
 by daylight on their heads. *Black & white braids.*
We'd come to my old homeland. These aging
 villains were those who had long ruled
 these lands. But years settled in,
 they were slow, lazy.

I told Dreamwalker. He knew more
 of my youth than the rest.

“What will you do?”

“I don't know.”

I still didn't know until the moment
 I saw your terrified turquoise eyes.

Then I knew why my little friend had
brought us here. *I was home. I could*
free these lands. I freed you, my little
friend, & you brought me back here
when I was ready.

And then your turquoise eyes.

We stayed for a few days. It wasn't
hard to see how people were living
a kind of long despair here. We began
to repair tents, boats, fishing nets.
The subdued knights of the road kept
away. Watching, grumbling. Waiting.

Dreamwalker was discontent. "Is that
all her reason for bringing us here?"
"It's not enough?"
"No. She knows of your quest, *our quest.*
She would not tangle your heart like
this with old woes."

But nothing. No cackles, nothing. I listened.
I helped put up structures in place
of old tents.

I sat in your company many hours.
Your turquoise eyes dreamed me every night.
This was the bonding Aunt had warned of.

I didn't know how to prove Dreamwalker right.
Nobody knew where the old women had
gone to.
"Were they real?" you asked softly.
"They sent me off into the world."
"Do they matter?"
Softly, "Deidre, they do."

She says nothing, & for awhile I am
distracted by a threat from the
highwaymen we'd displaced.

The lead one called me out. Longest
black & white braid, fattest paunch.
We stood facing each other.

“You left her long ago. Why return?”
 “A promise I would.”
 “Not to your brothers? They’re long gone.”
 “My brothers array me.”
 His smile a drunken leer. “We brought you
 here to share our bounty, & then move on.”

Unsettled, I returned to my tent.
 We couldn’t stay, & we couldn’t leave
 those men to do what they did.

It was Roddy came up with the answer.
 “We can’t stay. Neither can they.”
 I nodded. It was quick. Before a
 clumsy bloody tussle on their part,
 we had them blindfolded & hands bound,
 walked by sword-point the miles
 back to our boat, travelled several
 days by sea to what Roddy told me
 was a green, hospitable island, uninhabited.
My homeland finally free.

What should have made easier our going
 made it twice harder. These good
 people, & others when word travelled
 of our disposing their rough lords,
 called for a crown on my head,
 a union of disparate lands. And Deidre
 my turquoise-eyed queen. My brothers
 like noblemen to my court.

When Roddy & Odom back, we six
 betook ourselves on a long ride,
 said to survey our lands, plan
 more settlements.

Again, together, a campfire,
 six sets of eyes & no more.

"Tell me."

"Tell, my King?"

"*Tell me.*"

Francisco laughed. Not meanly, but still.

"*Say it.*"

"While I wait for our journey to resume,

I discover ragged girls in that camp

who wish to make pretty things.

Learn how. I could teach them

in many ways, but I don't." Stops.

Stares me down. "Waiting for you.

So tell me. Do I gather myself up

a froth of painting pretties, share

them around with the rest of you,

or do we ride on?"

I look around. They are tired.

They wait my word. I am theirs,

choicelessly. Even before you, Deidre.

I promise them an answer, ask their

patience. They nod. Someone laughs.

Mushroom tea & a bonfire big enough

to sing & shout by.

We ride back to camp in a few days

& there is news I'd stopped waiting

for. Dreamwalker tells me.

"The old women."

"What about them?"

"They're returned. They're to see you."

* * * * *

xiii. Leaves the Kingdom, Part 3

I still feel your cool hand on my face,

salving me from moaning dreams,

even as I lie here alone.

You were why they came back, why

they saw me. You agreed to let me go,

let us leave our Kingdom for the Island.

I didn't know. Dreamwalker told me where

to find their camp, offered to come

along, unsurprised I shook my head no.

I walk through my new kinsmen, smiling
at me, building, building, hope rousing
them before dawn, driving their tasks.

Say nothing, though notice, as often,
the grim look of Deidre's eldest brother,
reckons he would have felled the
biggest knight one day not far, &
braided his own hair, taken over.

Eventually the brown hills & up to
the White Woods, of course, & the *hmmm*
Dreamwalker taught me to find them.

I wish my Creature friends were around
right now, but they keep away from
disruptive times of men. And departures
like mine to come.

Their camp is a canvas igloo,
round, stove-piped for heat. The three
of them sit in front, big kettle over
a big fire. Cackling & clicking amongst
each other. I think of my little friend,
wonder anew the connection.

See me & cry me over! "Sit, sit,
our King, let us feed you, let us look
at you!" Clucking like a gaggle of
night-witch grannies.

I find a large stone to pull near
the fire & set on.

"I'm nobody's King."
They cackle & click. Soft, webby, ancient
shawls. Faces cragged, bodies decrepit,
eyes fierce & mocking.

"Where have you been?"
"Why have you returned?"
"*She brought me here.*"
"Where is she?"
"She's gone. I thought—"
"What?" their voices braid in & around
me, sometimes more than three,
sometimes one.

I think of Creatures. Their small faces.
Open, fearful, trusting, affectionate.

Talk. "I thought she brought me home
to liberate my homeland. And to find
you. Your clues to the Island."

I sip the craggy mug of tea in my
hands, doubt not the witchliness
of all this.

"What have you learned, our King?"
"Learned?"
"Since you left. Since we sent you
with one of her into the world."

I feel them nearer, the light of
the White Woods softer, murkier.
I choose to trust all of this.

"I've learned men are powerful & often
cruel, punishing the world for their own
mortalities. Would, if 'twere possible, transmute the green
& the very blood of this world to medicine,
& immortalize their violent, lonely hearts."

They cackle delightedly & embrace me
like soft covers of smoke.

"I thought it was men you sent me out
to discover how to save. It wasn't.
It was the world beset with men."

They cackle wildly & seem to scatter
into tiny little things that crawl
over me. Tickling . . . me?

I laugh. Crookedly, clumsily, but I do.
They laugh with me, hundreds of
little black & white pandy bears. I've seen
these before but something more
here. They are powerful. They are . . .
tending me.

Ticking becomes soft caress, little
kisses, nips at my old wounds &
long sadnesses alike. Each released to air
finally of its long, old poison, & tucked back
within me. I can't say what this all
is, but I grow stronger, clearer, gentler.

I am beat & breath & deed & word
 to serve this great world, hard world,
 cruel world, sweet subtle world,
 world of men, world containing men
 & all, worlds upon worlds.

We lie together in their canvas igloo,
 one a woman's form, one a man's,
 one shifting from tree to rock to Creature,
 insect, fish, bird, shifting to show me
 how easy, how various, how alike.

I open my eyes. I open my hands.
 I spread my legs & release my loins.
 I keep laughing & laughing as we all do,
 as we cum like first sun in a
 new universe, new light on all.

Falling with this light.
 Falling with this new light.

I wake alone, untrammeled clearing.
 I feel old wounds distantly now, curious,
 memories without fangs.

Blessed be! Creatures of the Woods
 approach, sniffing & uncertainly,
 but my arms wide open, my heart,
 clear, happy. White Bunny takes my lap
 as her own. Nuzzling me close are several
 pretty little giraffes, a few bears of
 different sizes. Many more.

What's more, a gift. I know where
 the Island is, the Tangled Gate,
 the Cave of the Beast. It is time.

You were why, Deidre, my only love.
You were why. As I parted my
 little friends that morning,
 soft, clean, clear, my hunger to know
 fed after so long, I still thought
 I could return to you, build our
 Kingdom, save the world & enjoy
 its fruits.

You were already fallen sick.
 You would soon be gone.

* * * * *



xiii. Leaves the Kingdom, Part 4

I didn't know. I didn't know. I didn't know.

When I returned from the White Woods,
I bore my new gift with heavy delight.
I believed my little friend had made it so,
returning me to this old homeland,
able now to liberate it, & eventually
to find those old women again, learn
finally the long-elusive route to the Island.

Yet I didn't say to any at first. I hesitated
with no reason. Was that really why
she had brought me back here? *Why doubt?*
Why now?

It wasn't you, Deidre, my love, for
I planned to return to you after.
Nor you, my brothers, for our bond
felt immutable.

Was it doubt that there was an Island?
Such a mystical thing as a Tangled Gate?

My years had greyed me some, strands
Deidre would stroke & smile over.
Her youth yearned something in my age,
the illusion that years bring knowing.
Years simply bring years, a loss of that
constant gaze to the horizon, the stars,
the touch of unknown plants & animals,
the need to shade full-eyed wonder
from every face one meets.

I walked through the camp all morning,
saying little, my smile enough to approve
& encourage these good people. Their homes
enlarged, now they've devoted hours to
our new community hall. A rough
wooden structure, with a long dining
table running its length. Already we
ate there many nights, talked over our days
of building & fishing. Our happy days together.

My brothers told stories of our travels.
 Entreated, not to boast. Most of the men
 admired, felt impelled to make this
 community's life a worthy arrival
 for us. The women eyed us, & tittered,
 & wondered how long my rumored rules
 would hold with Deidre at my side.

Eventually, returned to my tent,
 now several rooms, bigger than ought.
 To lay myself in her arms, breathe slower,
 forget awhile.

Her coughing foremost. A hurtful cough,
 deep & dry. Force without expulsion,
 without relief. She looked healthy
 to me, light pink in her cheeks,
 scrawny from years of deprivation but
 not more so. I made sure she fed full.

"What ails you, love?"
 "Nothing. Change of seasons, warmer
 days. Sleep with me awhile?"

She didn't ask where I'd been, since
 I would tell in a quiet, thoughtful hour.
 But those hours came & went. Her cough
 stayed, no better, no worse.

It was Dreamwalker who caught me up
 eventually. He'd let me be awhile,
 but he knew something. I'd long depended
 upon him this.

He found me sitting alone in the community
 hall. Leaned his *hekk* stick against
 the rough wall & came up to me
 where I sat. He embraced me, long
 & deep. The medicine of touch, of love's
 familiar privileged touch.

"You found them?"
 "Yes."
 "They showed you the way?"
 "Yes."
 "And yet?"
 Silence.

"We don't have to go."
 "It was never a choice."
 "I know."

He walked back over & fetched his *hekk*
 stick. Didn't leave. Liked to lean on it,
 to think better. Like some scratch a dog's
 head.

"Tonight? We'll talk?"
 Nod.
 Eventually he left, but I didn't. And
 nobody came before they did. His doing.

They trailed in with the day's work &
 words about them. Always boats & equipment
 & dwellings to repair. Everything building up.

But this was us. We six brothers.
 Someone brought our maps, long folded away.
 They didn't range around the room as
 usual when we talked. We sat close,
 huddled. Quiet.

The biggest map open, one we'd made
 along our travels. The ink newest
 from these coastal lands.

I pointed to an open stretch of water.
 An area of sea we'd never sailed.
 No land spoken of there by any we'd ever
 met.

Walked my fingers from where our
 boat lay at anchor, deep, deep into this
 vastless stretch of sea.

"There."
 Silence.
 "In the morning," Dreamwalker's voice,
 not my own.
 "How do we land on water?"
 "It will be there." Again, his voice.
 "How will we know?"

A fury lit from deep within me. The hungry years.
She wasn't getting better.
What had she done?

My fist on the table. *My brothers flinched.*
 “It’s there. It’s what we seek.
 Guarded, but we will be let in.”

I got up, turned from them, & walked out.
 Left them the map. Didn’t need it.

The morning I wild from the three
 dreams, & you are not abed.
 I remain still, matching in my thoughts
 the paltry might of one man’s intent
 against a world he came into unbidden,
 & will not be long departed before
 all trace of his prints are effaced.

I didn’t know. I didn’t know. I didn’t know.

* * * * *

xiii. Leaves the Kingdom, Part 5

A first day of something, an arrival,
 a new face, strange music, sheen
 in the memory, like bits of starlight
 fell upon your hand in a deep
 night Woods. Departure too, ending
 of something, especially sudden,
 every moment to the last weighted
 awkwardly in the heart’s grasp.

I knew we were going. My intent
 signaled at our meeting, my brothers
 would divide amongst them the readying,
 some to the packing of clothes & gear,
 some to the stores aboard our boat,
 its sails & weapons & storage.

Usually Dreamwalker & I left to figure
 routes, dangers, what the next place
 might tell us, how we would acquire it.
 The rest preferred busyness to thinking,
 the former less about hope & despair.
 We endured by this complement.

Not even Dreamwalker as I walked
 from our tent. No Deidre either.
 I knew her cough would wake her
 early, & often she would before
 light betake herself to the seaside
 not far from camp.

Walked to there, among emaciated
hills, scrawny brown fields. One last
climb, & there it was. The Wide Wide Sea.
Where my brothers & I had lived
so many of our days, where my beloved
Deidre had come from.

Especially in our early days,
she would wake me before light
to go sit with her by the water.
Whether it took the sudden waking to the
wide open upon me turquoise eyes
I knew would not shut again soon,
or a playful hand or wet lick
upon my cock, we'd dress in little
& scuttle out of camp. A small cove.

Unfindable by day, because the tide
would suck it flat, she somehow
knew the mornings when countless
liquid fingers would shape it for us
to coze in, our bear-covered brown
blanket upon us. *Hmmmming* with
the now-whispering, now yowling Sea.

Entwined to our fingers, we'd listen,
we'd *hmmm*, we'd close our eyes &
let the salty air tend our creaks
& worries. The Sea before us would
seep & sing into the Sea in our veins.
She would be returned there, with me,
as was otherwise impossible.

"The old women found me," she
began suddenly, after several of
these early visits. Points not far
from our cove. "There. 'Lips puckering
like a fish's,' they said. They tended
me, raised me up, till my brothers'
family claimed me." Tells me no more
for many visits.

Then one morning, my cum still staining
her sharp smiling teeth, bit of blood too,
she says: "They told me I wasn't from
the Sea originally. They said I'd fallen
from the sky, from the stars, &
lived deep deep below for years,
a hundred, a thousand."

“Were you a Sea nymph they found
choking upon the shore?”
She only twines me tighter.

Fewer pre-dawn trysts for me. Her cough
took her away alone more often.
But for that night not long ago.

“One day my debt of thanks will be
paid to them, my King. I hope
we are both doddering old. One day
they might return me to the Sea
for their stranger reasons.”

I convulse suddenly but her finger
on my lips, her smiling turquoise
eyes hush me. “Like you, my love.
Like the Island & Tangled Gate
you seek.”

It’s not early light or before, &
I do not think I will find our cove,
yet I do. She’d sat here, I see her
footprints in the sand. Specks
of blood? I cannot know.

Then I reckon how her footprints
do not lead back to our camp.
Only onward. I follow the impressions
of her small bare feet, the small toes,
shapely ankles I’d often kissed,
vowing in my laughing lover’s foolery
to taste every inch of her surface.

Passing morning but no hint of sun
in the overcast grey. The tide
swishes ever in, now a gentle
wave, now a muscular one. Nears
her prints inch by inch, & I can
see too that she was walking
ever closer, mulling, deciding?

Till she is standing, was standing,
facing the water, her so-long home.
The old women’s pledge to keep?
Yet another thing. She has drawn
in the sand a large set of prints,
somehow contorted to impress
these cleanly next to hers. Water
ever nearing now.

I remove my boots & step in.
 They fit as though my own feet had
 rendered them. Now I stand
 next to her. I look out to the
 Wide Wide Sea. Close my eyes & reach
 my hand to hers. It is cool,
 as it was this morning against
 my crazed dreaming's cheek.

My eyes shut, I *hmmm* a long time,
 braiding remembrance of hers
 with mine, the water drinking
 up to my ankles, my calves.
 Would likely have let it consume
 me too like seeming did her, but a
 faint tug, another, now stronger.
 I will not be let to drown in this parting.
 Its awkward weight already upon me.

* * * * *

xiii. Leaves the Kingdom, Part 6

It was years, centuries, a thousand
 thousand miles from the last day
 when I found myself arcing like an
 impossibly high wave back, back
 toward that departure day.

You brought me an orange. Like I could
 love you, cherish your gifts, gestures,
 touches. Like you weren't raw girl-meat
 tender to your young bones, beneath me,
 above me, snarling I'd consume you
 for all I'd lost, all to be no more.

You dressed as I wished, your hair in
 braids never made of them before,
 ruffled blue bonnet low on your brow,
 black stockings, black leather shoes,
 oh the salmon pink dress with not
 a scrap of underwear beneath.



*Was I fucking back over time? Was
your body my starcraft?* I chewed
through your covering, pocked your
perfect skin with my nails & fangs.
Fucked your bare cunt like a tight
pink chamber pot for my raw waste,
fucked your sweet ass like something
trembling within to be released,
like the whisper-pink cockatoo waited
to burst membranes & fly free.

I hadn't told you about the orange.
How it followed me out of
that dream, followed me in one way
& another all the years since that
morning.

You took my hard & sloppy cummings
alike, from a raw lonely want the poets
& fools call love. Wore the braids,
the blue bonnet, repaired the dress
of my rentings, cleaned off my cum,
because another's honest embrace,
or any embrace, tis all cuts down
the raising winds of mortality.

Your orange I kept in my private temple.
Where I fucked you privately, where
I reeked my raising winds privately,
freely, no embrace to divert.

Lights extinguished, statues of sacred
figures obscured to rightly meagerness,
I held this orange & remembered
you, your taste, the Gate so close to
this Castle & yet mute as ever to my wishes
& questions, I held your orange &
began to *hmmm* as I had not quite
done since the morning she left me,
hours before my ship & brothers left for
this Island, that Cave, that Gate.

Open my eyes. Your footprints, the ones
you made for me, that I stand in,
all gone. I began to walk, I began to run,
from the shore of the Wide Wide Sea,
faster & faster, to the brown hills leading
up to the White Woods. *Hmmmming*
my way to those old women, my fists
my intention.

They were gone, like never were.
 Canvas igloo, soup kettle, nothing.
 A clearing never touched by men.
 The *hmmm* crackled & left my lips &
 was gone. I stood there forever.
 I stand here still. I stand on this
 beach still. I recline on this night's hill
 still, watching the blinking sky
 with my laughing brothers. Cackling
 with my little friend this night, &
 this one, & this one.

Leave another piece of me, slowly
 return to camp. Legs moving,
 heart missing. Time to leave this Kingdom.

The community hall is filled & I'm told
 of visitors come seeking refuge
 from a distant war, continuous persecution.

They call me King, all these good
 kinsmen, but I sit at the long table
 as the rest. Next to Deirdre's brother
 whose smile cools me on the warmest
 day. I nod the visitors to sit across
 the table, tell their stories.

They are Travellers, like my brother-
 sister Asoyadonna, & I wish she was
 here to seal their welcome. A ragged
 group, about twenty in all, mostly
 thin-cheeked men, a few downcast women.

I sit. I listen. Their Village destroyed,
 their flight, their losses. A few more,
 feeble old & slow young, kept safe in
 a cave nearby in the White Woods.

I wonder uselessly: had they seen
 my old women? Say nothing. Nod.
 Nod again. Listen less. Nod. Nod again.

Deidre's brother questions them in
 my stead. Nods. Listens. His green eyes
 holds them close, his hands lay open
 before him on the thick table top.
 He warms the air between our two
 sides of the table. The air shares
 among us. I realize something.

They will all be OK. We have to go.
She's gone. I have to find her.

They will stay with us. We will feed
 them strong, mend their clothes,
 medicine their hearts. Should their
 pursuers venture this far, we will
 defend to the last.

For now, pull out the old tents.
 Bring them to the Sea to clean, splash,
 maybe laugh.
 A big fire tonight, soup, stew, bread.
 Sleep. The kind those in flight from
 their burnt homes never glimpse.

Other days, nights, their secret
 ways of living shared. Their songs,
 their magicks. I nod. I listen.
 This will compensate our going.
 The decision is made, easily, &
 I walk alone to my tent.

I find my old travel knapsack,
 pack it about as full as when
 I arrived here. Not keeping all this,
 not letting it go either.

A nightfall to wait. A note to leave.
 No promises of return, but neither
 denials of fealty to all here.

I sit on our bed, Deidre, till the
 light retreats, till it is gone.
 Wait a prompting, wait some stall.
 The ship waits. My brothers wait.
 They don't know of Deidre, of the new
 arrivals. They wait me.

The voices of returned bathers, cleaned,
 happier, of meal-making, of a night
 for happy bonding, & I stand. Someone
 will come to fetch me, fetch Deidre.
 Ask of my brothers. Shoulder my
 knapsack. Behind our bed a hidden
 flap, door quickly out of camp,
 if needed.

I look back now, tonight, as I didn't
allow myself then. The boat was
an hour's lope away. *Was I leaving to find
you? Or save the world? Did I yet serve
this world with my beat & breath
& deed & word? What would tug me back
next time I entered the water?*



* * * * *



Judih Haggai

night crawls
through the labyrinth
solution unfound

* * *

whisper in dreams
netherworld invitation
such temptation

* * *

upon awakening
dream still wet on my lips
dare i surrender?

* * *

long silence
after dreams, before the birds
enough space for thanks

* * *

poem slips away
as birds enter full-scale song
beauty's voice

* * *

my spirit wills
yet my eyelids rebel
rainy morning

* * *

green apple
Canadian accents
airport lounge

* * *

900 pupils
shuffle the paths
through fresh wheat fields

* * *

saturday soundtrack
clock beats and bird tremolos
who needs haiku?

* * *

especially now
nothing but possibility
sit down, drink water

* * *

four twenty-four
body and mind hold hands
lift me from bed

* * *

sounds and blankets
claim what you can
long cold night

* * * * *



Christopher Robin Leads an Expotition to the North Pole

[Classic Fiction]

Originally published in Winnie-the-Pooh, E.P. Dutton, 1926.

One fine day Pooh had stumped up to the top of the Forest to see if his friend Christopher Robin was interested in Bears at all. At breakfast that morning (a simple meal of marmalade spread lightly over a honeycomb or two) he had suddenly thought of a new song. It began like this:

Sing Ho! For the life of a Bear!

When he had got as far as this, he scratched his head, and thought to himself: "That's a very good start for a song, but what about the second line?" He tried singing "Ho," two or three times, but it didn't seem to help. "Perhaps it would be better," he thought, "if I sang Hi for the life of a Bear." So he sang it . . . but it wasn't. "Very well, then," he said, "I shall sing that first line twice, and perhaps if I sing it very quickly, I shall find myself singing the third and fourth lines before I have time to think of them, and that will be a Good Song. Now then:

Sing Ho! for the life of a Bear!
Sing Ho! for the life of a Bear!
I don't much mind if it rains or snows,
'Cos I've got a lot of honey on my nice new nose!
I don't much care if it snows or thaws,
'Cos I've got a lot of honey on my nice clean paws!
Sing Ho! for a Bear!
Sing Ho! for a Pooh!
And I'll have a little something in an hour or two!

He was so pleased with this song that he sang it all the way to the top of the Forest, "and if I go on singing it much longer," he thought, "it will be time for the little something, and then the last line won't be true." So he turned it into a hum instead.

Christopher Robin was sitting outside his door, putting on his Big Boots. As soon as he saw the Big Boots, Pooh knew that an Adventure was going to happen, and he brushed the honey off his nose with the back of his paw, and spruced himself up as well as he could, so as to look Ready for Anything.

"Good morning, Christopher Robin," he called out.

"Hallo, Pooh Bear. I can't get this boot on."

"That's bad," said Pooh.

"Do you think you could very kindly lean against me, 'cos I keep pulling so hard that I fall over backwards."

Pooh sat down, dug his feet into the ground, and pushed hard against Christopher Robin's



Decoration by Ernest H. Shepard

back, and Christopher Robin pushed hard against his, and pulled and pulled at his boot until he had got it on.

"And that's that," said Pooh. "What do we do next?"

"We are all going on an Expedition," said Christopher Robin, as he got up and brushed himself. "Thank you, Pooh."

"Going on an Expotition?" said Pooh eagerly. "I don't think I've ever been on one of those. Where are we going to on this Expotition?"

"Expedition, silly old Bear. It's got an 'x' in it."

"Oh!" said Pooh. "I know." But he didn't really.

"We're going to discover the North Pole."

"Oh!" said Pooh again. "What *is* the North Pole?" he asked.

"It's just a thing you discover," said Christopher Robin carelessly, not being quite sure himself.

"Oh! I see," said Pooh. "Are bears any good at discovering it?"

"Of course they are. And Rabbit and Kanga and all of you. It's an Expedition. That's what an Expedition means. A long line of everybody. You'd better tell the others to get ready, while I see if my gun's all right. And we must all bring Provisions."

"Bring what?"

"Things to eat."

"Oh!" said Pooh happily. "I thought you said Provisions. I'll go and tell them." And he stumped off.

The first person he met was Rabbit.

"Hallo, Rabbit," he said, "is that you?"

"Let's pretend it isn't," said Rabbit, "and see what happens."

"I've got a message for you."

"I'll give it to him."

"We're all going on an Expotition with Christopher Robin!"

"What is it when we're on it?"

"A sort of boat, I think," said Pooh.

"Oh! that sort."

"Yes. And we're going to discover a Pole or something. Or was it a Mole? Anyhow we're going to discover it."

"We are, are we?" said Rabbit.

"Yes. And we've got to bring Po—things to eat with us. In case we want to eat them. Now I'm going down to Piglet's. Tell Kanga, will you?"

He left Rabbit and hurried down to Piglet's house.

The Piglet was sitting on the ground at the door of his house blowing happily at a dandelion, and wondering whether it would be this year, next year, some time or never. He had just discovered that it would be never, and was trying to remember what "it" was, and hoping it wasn't anything nice, when Pooh came up.

"Oh! Piglet," said Pooh excitedly, "we're going on an Expotition, all of us, with things to eat. To discover something."

"To discover what?" said Piglet anxiously.

"Oh! just something."

"Nothing fierce?"

"Christopher Robin didn't say anything about fierce. He just said it had an 'x.'"

"It isn't their necks I mind," said Piglet earnestly. "It's their teeth. But if Christopher Robin is coming I don't mind anything."

In a little while they were all ready at the top of the Forest, and the Expotition started. First came Christopher Robin and Rabbit; then Piglet and Pooh; then Kanga, with Roo in her pocket, and

Owl; then Eeyore; and, at the end, in a long line, all Rabbit's friends-and-relations.

"I didn't ask them," explained Rabbit carelessly. "They just came. They always do. They can march at the end, after Eeyore."

"What I say," said Eeyore, "is that it's unsettling. I didn't want to come on this Expo—what Pooh said. I only came to oblige. But here I am; and if I am the end of the Expo—what we're talking about—then let me be the end. But if, every time I want to sit down for a little rest, I have to brush away half a dozen of Rabbit's smaller friends-and-relations first, then this isn't an Expo—whatever it is—at all, it's simply a Confused Noise. That's what I say."

"I see what Eeyore means," said Owl. "If you ask me—"

"I'm not asking anybody," said Eeyore. "I'm just telling everybody. We can look for the North Pole, or we can play 'Here we go gathering Nuts and May' with the end part of an ants' nest. It's all the same to me."

There was a shout from the top of the line.

"Come on!" called Christopher Robin.

"Come on!" called Pooh and Piglet.

"Come on!" called Owl.

"We're starting," said Rabbit. "I must go." And he hurried off to the front of the Expotition with Christopher Robin.

"All right," said Eeyore. "We're going. Only Don't Blame Me."

So off they all went to discover the Pole. And as they walked, they chattered to each other of this and that, all except Pooh, who was making up a song.

"This is the first verse," he said to Piglet, when he was ready with it.

"First verse of what?"

"My song."

"What song?"

"This one."

"Which one?"

"Well, if you listen, Piglet, you'll hear it."

"How do you know I'm not listening?" Pooh couldn't answer that one, so he began to sing.

*They all went off to discover the Pole,
Owl and Piglet and Rabbit and all;
It's a Thing you Discover, as I've been told
By Owl and Piglet and Rabbit and all.
Eeyore, Christopher Robin, and Pooh
And Rabbit's relations all went too—
And where the Pole was none of them knew . . .
Sing Hey! for Owl and Rabbit and all!*

"Hush!" said Christopher Robin turning round to Pooh, "we're just coming to a Dangerous Place."

"Hush!" said Pooh turning round quickly to Piglet.

"Hush!" said Piglet to Kanga.

"Hush!" said Kanga to Owl, while Roo said "Hush!" several times to himself, very quietly.

"Hush!" said Owl to Eeyore.

"*Hush!*" said Eeyore in a terrible voice to all Rabbit's friends-and-relations, and "Hush!" they said hastily to each other all down the line, until it got to the last one of all. And the last and smallest friend-and-relation was so upset to find that the whole Expotition was saying "Hush!" to *him*, that he buried himself head downwards in a crack in the ground, and stayed there for two days until the danger

was over, and then went home in a great hurry, and lived quietly with his Aunt ever-afterwards. His name was Alexander Beetle.

They had come to a stream which twisted and tumbled between high rocky banks, and Christopher Robin saw at once how dangerous it was.

"It's just the place," he explained, "for an Ambush."

"What sort of bush?" whispered Pooh to Piglet. "A gorse-bush?"

"My dear Pooh," said Owl in his superior way, "don't you know what an Ambush is?"

"Owl," said Piglet, looking round at him severely, "Pooh's whisper was a perfectly private whisper, and there was no need—"

"An Ambush," said Owl, "is a sort of Surprise."

"So is a gorse-bush sometimes," said Pooh.

"An Ambush, as I was about to explain to Pooh," said Piglet, "is a sort of Surprise."

"If people jump out at you suddenly, that's an Ambush," said Owl.

"It's an Ambush, Pooh, when people jump at you suddenly," explained Piglet.

Pooh, who now knew what an Ambush was, said that a gorse-bush had sprung at him suddenly one day when he fell off a tree, and he had taken six days to get all the prickles out of himself.

"We are not *talking* about gorse-bushes," said Owl a little crossly.

"I am," said Pooh.

They were climbing very cautiously up the stream now, going from rock to rock, and after they had gone a little way they came to a place where the banks widened out at each side, so that on each side of the water there was a level strip of grass on which they could sit down and rest. As soon as he saw this, Christopher Robin called "Halt!" and they all sat down and rested.

"I think," said Christopher Robin, "that we ought to eat all our Provisions now, so that we shan't have so much to carry."

"Eat all our what?" said Pooh.

"All that we've brought," said Piglet, getting to work.

"That's a good idea," said Pooh, and he got to work too.

"Have you all got something?" asked Christopher Robin with his mouth full.

"All except me," said Eeyore. "As Usual." He looked round at them in his melancholy way. "I suppose none of you are sitting on a thistle by any chance?"

"I believe I am," said Pooh. "Ow!" He got up, and looked behind him. "Yes, I was. I thought so."

"Thank you, Pooh. If you've quite finished with it." He moved across to Pooh's place, and began to eat.

"It doesn't do them any Good, you know, sitting on them," he went on, as he looked up munching. "Takes all the Life out of them. Remember that another time, all of you. A little Consideration, a little Thought for Others, makes all the difference."

As soon as he had finished his lunch Christopher Robin whispered to Rabbit, and Rabbit said, "Yes, yes, of course," and they walked a little way up the stream together.

"I didn't want the others to hear," said Christopher Robin.

"Quite so," said Rabbit, looking important.

"It's—I wondered—It's only—Rabbit, I suppose you don't know. What does the North Pole look like?"

"Well," said Rabbit, stroking his whiskers. "Now you're asking me."

"I did know once, only I've sort of forgotten," said Christopher Robin carelessly.

"It's a funny thing," said Rabbit, "but I've sort of forgotten too, although I did know once."

"I suppose it's just a pole stuck in the ground?"

"Sure to be a pole," said Rabbit, "because of calling it a pole, and if it's a pole, well, I should think it would be sticking in the ground, shouldn't you, because there'd be nowhere else to stick it."

"Yes, that's what I thought."

"The only thing," said Rabbit, "is, *where is it sticking?*"

"That's what we're looking for," said Christopher Robin.

They went back to the others. Piglet was lying on his back, sleeping peacefully. Roo was washing his face and paws in the stream, while Kanga explained to everybody proudly that this was the first time he had ever washed his face himself, and Owl was telling Kanga an Interesting Anecdote full of long words like Encyclopedia and Rhododendron to which Kanga wasn't listening.

"I don't hold with all this washing," grumbled Eeyore. "This modern Behind-the-ears nonsense. What do *you* think, Pooh?"

"Well, said Pooh, "I think—"

But we shall never know what Pooh thought, for there came a sudden squeak from Roo, a splash, and a loud cry of alarm from Kanga.

"So much for *washing*," said Eeyore.

"Roo's fallen in!" cried Rabbit, and he and Christopher Robin came rushing down to the rescue.

"Look at me swimming!" squeaked Roo from the middle of his pool, and was hurried down a waterfall into the next pool.

"Are you all right, Roo dear?" called Kanga anxiously.

"Yes!" said Roo. "Look at me sw—" and down he went over the next waterfall into another pool.

Everybody was doing something to help. Piglet, wide awake suddenly, was jumping up and down and making "Oo, I say" noises; Owl was explaining that in a case of Sudden and Temporary Immersion the Important Thing was to keep the Head Above Water; Kanga was jumping along the bank, saying "Are you *sure* you're all right, Roo dear?" to which Roo, from whatever pool he was in at the moment, was answering, "Look at me swimming!" Eeyore had turned round and hung his tail over the first pool into which Roo fell, and with his back to the accident was grumbling quietly to himself, and saying, "All this washing; but catch on to my tail, little Roo, and you'll be all right"; and Christopher Robin and Rabbit came hurrying past Eeyore, and were calling out to the others in front of them.

"All right, Roo, I'm coming," called Christopher Robin.

"Get something across the stream lower down, some of you fellows," called Rabbit.

But Pooh was getting something. Two pools below Roo he was standing with a long pole in his paws, and Kanga came up and took one end of it, and between them they held it across the lower part of the pool; and Roo, still bubbling proudly, "Look at me swimming," drifted up against it, and climbed out.

"Did you see me swimming?" squeaked Roo excitedly, while Kanga scolded him and rubbed him down. "Pooh, did you see me swimming? That's called swimming, what I was doing. Rabbit, did you see what I was doing? Swimming. Hallo, Piglet! I say, Piglet! What do you think I was doing! Swimming! Christopher Robin, did you see me—"

But Christopher Robin wasn't listening. He was looking at Pooh.

"Pooh," he said, "where did you find that pole?"

Pooh looked at the pole in his hands.

"I just found it," he said. "I thought it ought to be useful. I just picked it up."

"Pooh," said Christopher Robin solemnly, "the Expedition is over. You have found the North Pole!"

"Oh!" said Pooh.

Eeyore was sitting with his tail in the water when they all got back to him.

"Tell Roo to be quick, somebody," he said. "My tail's getting cold. I don't want to mention it, but I just mention it. I don't want to complain, but there it is. My tail's cold."

"Here I am!" squeaked Roo.

"Oh, there you are."

"Did you see me swimming?"

Eeyore took his tail out of the water, and swished it from side to side.

"As I expected," he said. "Lost all feeling. Numbed it. That's what it's done. Numbed it. Well, as long as nobody minds, I suppose it's all right."

"Poor old Eeyore! I'll dry it for you," said Christopher Robin, and he took out his handkerchief and rubbed it up.

"Thank you, Christopher Robin. You're the only one who seems to understand about tails. They don't think—that's what's the matter with some of these others. They've no imagination. A tail isn't a tail to *them*, it's just a Little Bit Extra at the back."

"Never mind, Eeyore," said Christopher Robin, rubbing his hardest. "Is *that* better?"

"It's feeling more like a tail perhaps. It Belongs again, if you know what I mean."

"Hullo, Eeyore," said Pooh, coming up to them with his pole.

"Hullo, Pooh. Thank you for asking, but I shall be able to use it again in a day or two."

"Use what?" said Pooh.

"What we are talking about."

"I wasn't talking about anything," said Pooh, looking puzzled.

"My mistake again. I thought you were saying how sorry you were about my tail, being all numb, and could you do anything to help?"

"No," said Pooh. "That wasn't me," he said. He thought for a little and then suggested helpfully: "Perhaps it was somebody else."

"Well, thank him for me when you see him."

Pooh looked anxiously at Christopher Robin.

"Pooh's found the North Pole," said Christopher Robin. "Isn't that lovely?"

Pooh looked modestly down.

"Is that it?" said Eeyore.

"Yes," said Christopher Robin.

"Is that what we were looking for?"

"Yes," said Pooh.

"Oh!" said Eeyore. "Well, anyhow—it didn't rain," he said.

They stuck the pole in the ground, and Christopher Robin tied a message on to it:



Then they all went home again. And I think, but I am not quite sure, that Roo had a hot bath and went straight to bed. But Pooh went back to his own house, and feeling very proud of what he had done, had a little something to revive himself.

* * * * *



Colin James

Expect An Older Assassin

You might see me coming.
I walk bent over,
talk to myself,
& drag my right foot.

I don't necessarily travel well
in the dark anymore,
which is unfortunate since
there is an abundance lately.

My long hair is dyed so blonde
it's almost orange.
I am currently the purveyor
& protector of the winds
that all seem to go right through me.

After an impromptu inspection,
my cape is still magnificent.
Towards the bottom edge
there are some problematic stains,
and a continuous dampness
I can't quite account for
without completely disrobing formally,
& performing a further inspection at my end.

Millions of bacteria vacation
in these crevasses.
They can't afford an ocean view
so settle for a long stroll
to the only perpetual sand dune
where light still has an esoteric hue.

This year's renters
memorize their cabin numbers
by conscientiously counting hair follicles
like that cave giant Polyphemus,
crave soft skin yet edible with three
meals or so yet to choose.

* * *

Man In Tree

Curt introductions.
One branch in particular
is noticeably stressed,
witlessly weighted down.

Our climber the *ferae naturae*
is not apologetic,
displays an unstable credulity.

Indignant to the wind,
he pisses
absurdly close to me.

Now this modern nonconformist,
pursuer of a bilateral destination,
must die either way.

* * *

The Unlikelihood of Certainty

"If you want
& I know you want,
I could arrange some entertainment!"

The voice trailed off
through the crowded room
past a very big picture window.

Outside, the ocean was black
just a few intermittent whitecaps.

I never imagined
your arms would be so thin.

* * * * *





Bags End Book #6: The Grand Scheme of Liberation!, Part 3

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

O! Sickness! Fooey!

First Doktor Miss Chris checked mah heartbonebeat with her pariscope. Then Doktor Greenface looked carefully at mah fur 4or colors other than the usual brown & white. Then Doctor PurplePurpleEyes tickled me a lot.

Worse was when mah visitors came.

That silly baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow would bawl a lot with her helmet in her hands, until her big sister Elizabeth would take her away for a nap.

Then Leo the Dark Man would show up with a big pile of Action Man comic books & read a lot of them to me until Princess Crissy would come to nicely take him away too.

Then that nice smiling fella Jacky Clown would come to see me in his

Bugs End News
 No. 254 March 18, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunney
 Written Down By: Lori Bunney
 Medical Staff: Dokter Mrs Chris,
 Dokter Greenfase, an Dokter
 Perpul Perpul Eys

O! Siknes! Fooy!

Ferst Dokter Mees Chrees chekd mah hartkonbeet with her paris kop. Then Dokter Greenfas looked kerfullee at mah fer for colers uthen than the uzal brown an wit. Then Dokter Perpul Perpul Iyys tikeld me alot.

Wers waz wen mah viziters kam.

That sily babee Sargent Lisa-Maree Chowe wood bawl alot with her helmit in her hands untill her big sister Elizibith wood tak her away for a rap.

Bugs End News
 No. 258 March 25, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunney
 Written Down By: Lori Bunney

In Serch of the Xtra Cord!

Yor old pal Algernon has new fold a storee in hiz newspaper as long as thiz wyn. Thiz wlm goz on an on an gets weerd an weerd. I kn, alot of it iz about me to wich iz a test for mah humbillitee. It wood be mor of a test if I waz les kon-fosd an pushd around in it.

Aftir awl, we'r up too the part of the storee weer I waz siting on the porch Princes Crissy mad for me, outsid her cassett, look w. Weer up too the part weer I herd the Midnit Song of the Bony Rillaz eksept it wazent midnit. an thier waz more too.

Bugs End News
 No. 259 April 1, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunney
 Written Down By: Lori Bunney

Tim Soon for the Citee!

Uzallee I rit mah newspaper about things wich hav jest hapend to me. But thiz tim I am riting about nowe. Wen I rit mah newspaper nekst tim, it will bee too tel about things wich hav allredy hapend.

Yu see, I hav too go too the Citee wich iz a big plas in Mees Chreeses Konetikut. Mees Chrees told me that somtims she wood go thier in a kar an allso that both she an her bruthrs an mebee Kamy waz awl bord thier.

Stil, ~~it~~ itz a big plac an I hav too go thier alon'an I hav allee mah pleege wils an Rich

Bugs End News
 No. 260 October 14, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunney
 Written Down By: Lori Bunney

So Wat Hapend, Algernon?

Sam peepel saye yor old pal Algernon hazz a funny aksent in hiz voys. Mebee thatz too.

But wen I tawk, seey, mah voys an wends an awl bloo jeens an slowch, ya no.

Wen I rit mah papr, thatz difrent. Then I bekom letter jaket an dark glases dresd in mah wends.

Wel, sortuf, I mean, I dont' reelly weer glases an mah fer is betr than letter for me enyway. But garb, good garb, betr garb than jest outland tawk iz wat I am trying too tawk about mah pensil.

Tim too get dresd up agen, pal.

box inside the wagon pulled by that half-asleep Ramie the Toy Tall Boy who is also a veteran Lazybug. Jacky would tell me a lot of funny jokes but in Squeak language, which I don't know, & he would laugh a lot until Miss Chris would come & drag Ramie & Jacky away. Just wish I knowed Squeak.

Then mah silly kin named Alexander Puppy would come with that nice language-knowing green-eyed Allie Leopard. Alex would look at me & then get sad, and then a say a loud unhappy "BUMP!" & sit right down on the floor & suck his toe for awhile. Then he would stand up again & sing a sad Bump song for ill relatives, or something, until I would YELL for him to go away.

It went on & on like this & still nothing helped & nobody understood why I would keep acting like a regular dog sometimes. Mostly I would want to lick Crissy's nice face. O! Yuk! Or I would try to find a leash so that Miss Chris could take me for a walk.

It began to get worse tho. Mah friend & newspaper writer-downer Lory Bunny told that a big fight broke out in Mister Owl's class at school when Denny & Cory Puppy, who are in the Secret Puppy Club, argued that I wasn't sick, I was finally getting better. Lory said Alex yelled a lot of Bump stuff & Sheila put up her furry little dukes & threatened to thrash anyone who messed with her beagle. Me? Sheila's beagle?

Sheila's affection for me didn't last too long tho cuz one time when Dog came over me, I chased her around the room trying to catch her. She ran really fast & when I had her cornered I was me again.

"Why are you in a corner, Sheila?" I asked. Guess who got thrashed then??

One afternoon, I was alone with Princess Crissy for the first time in a long time. No doctors or crazed relatives or Puppy traditionists in sight.

Crissy was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking very worried & unhappy & unCrissylike.

"How do I get well?" I asked.

Crissy was quiet 4or a long time. Then she said, "What's wrong with you, Algeron, is what's wrong with the Bunny Pillows. An it was Farmer Jones who did it."

"What did he do?"

Crissy stared at me hard. "He did something to the Pillows so they would evolve."

"What's that?"

"It means grow up & out. It usually doesn't happen in fantasylands."

"But what?"

Crissy sighed. "He made it so the Bunny Pillows will become the thing after what they are now. Pillows don't have faces, right?"

"Yes."

"So somehow he did that. I don't know how but you got it too. And now you're becoming a dog from a puppy."

"But dogs don't talk!"

"Yes."

"So, um, how am I evolving if I start acting all dum & barking & not talking?"

Crissy sighed again. Her sighs make me very sad. "I don't know. I guess it depends on whether fantasylands evolve to places like Connecticut or the other way around."

Now I thinked a lot. "I have to find Farmer Jones, don't I?"

Crissy nodded.

"But what if I 4orget who I am & get all Dog when I am looking? I could be lost 4ever!"

Crissy nodded.

I was getting sleepy again & so Crissy got in the bed with me & holded me in her arms. She rocked me softly & hmmmed nicely to me. I was very happy for a moment & licked her face be4ore going to sleep.

Crissy had made a porch outside of her Castle's back door when I had been in exile. Since I was visiting her again, I asked her if I could be sick on the porch some days.

Now Beagles Sanctuary, which is what it was called, was no Milne's Porch, but it did come with its own Princess Crissy, who is one of mah best friends, & a most stout supporter too.

Sometimes Crissy would ban all the doktors & let me sit alone on the Sanctuary all day. I was on a couch almost as comfy as Miss Chris's Suzy Couch, & Crissy would put a blanket on me & give me little kisses on mah 4orehead be4ore leaving.

She used her magick to make it so I couldn't run away if I suddenly went Dog.

So there I was one day on the couch by mahself resting. Suddenly I heard the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pilows like I had be4ore!

I was running up & down on the Sanctuary listening & barking like a crazy guy! I heard it! I heard it!

And I howlsinged with it too. I was so excited I 4orgot beagles don't sing too good.

But I heard more than just the Bunny Pillows. I heard a musical instrument. A electric guitar. I listened & barked & barked & barked.

Then mah pal Princess Crissy came running onto the Sanctuary.

"What's wrong, Algeron?" she asked all worried.

"Don't you hear it?"

Crissy listened. "Hear what?"

I looked at her like she was nuts now.

"You don't hear it?"

Crissy listened some more. "That's just the wind, isn't it?"

In Search of the Xtra Chord!

Your old pal Algernon has never told a story as long as this before. And this one just keeps getting weirder & weirder as it goes along too.

I had just heard the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows, except it wasn't midnight, & there was more to the song than last time I heard it. This time the song had a electric guitar in it. It was a good guitar too & the really funny thing is that I sort of thought I knew the guitar player!

Princess Crissy had rushed up to me while I listened, & then excitedly runned around barking about it, but she couldn't hear it.

"Crissy, it's the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows!" I yelled.

She looked at me confused with her nice face. "It's not midnight."

"I know! And you know what? I know more about the guitar part!"

"The Bunny Pillow Song has a guitar part?"

I nodded mah head. The song was getting softer, & ending, & Crissy hadn't heard it.

"Yes," I said impatiently. I had to hurry.

I made Crissy sit on the Beagles Sanctary comfy couch. I crawled into her lap & made her hands pick me up to near her face.

"Now, Crissy," I said, all serious, tho I could see a sneaky bit of smile

on her face. "I want you to look at me carefully & concentrate real hard. Then I want you to do just a tiny bit of your magick. An lissen!"

So me & Crissy looked at each other, & Crissy smiled a little more loudly, but I bet mahself that this was her magick doing smile, not her "Algernon you're so cute but nutz but I love you anyway" smile like before.

The song finally ended, & I looked anxiously at her face for signs of hearing.

"I think I heard it," she said slowly. She put me on the couch next to her, & I rested on her folded legs & looked up at her.

"What did you hear, Crissy?"

"Well," she said. "It's about time, I think."

"Like to do with me evolving into a dog?"

Crissy smiled at me. "You got sick when you went to save Betsy & the other Pillows. What he did there, Jones, was to interrupt the Stays-Is."

"What?"

Crissy was getting excited like she saw it all or something. I didn't see any & I don't have fancy tricks like tricky smile magick.

"The guitar was the hint we needed!"

"You know who played it?"

Trying to pretend to be smart like real smart guys like Crissy & Sheila & Miss Chris is mostly beyond your poor old slow-thinking pal Algernon. But this one time I knew the answer.

"It was Rich Americus & Noisy Children!" Those guys are this rock & roll band that I know who live in the City, which is a big place near Miss Chris's house in her homeland Connecticut. An Rich also writes this book called Galleons Lap which is about famous places like Oz & Narnia & Wonderful, & also sometimes about obscure slouchy places like Bags End.

"No," Crissy said, not smiling no more.

"No?"

"It was just Rich Americus."

"O," said me. I expected Crissy to say more, but she was quiet instead of her turn talking.

"Crissy?"

She gave me that worried "I love you Algernon but you have to go into danger now" look.

"Algernon, sometimes all we have in life are guesses."

"Is that all we have this time, Crissy?"

"Yes."

Mah courage felt small & cold & old & at the very bottom of mah heartbone. Mah courage seemed like a old guy who looked at me all grumpy & said, "get away from me, kid, you bother me."

"OK, Crissy, what's our guess?"

"I think Rich Americus is sad over the past, & not going forward, & Jones borrowed what he's not using to defeat Jones once & 4or all."

Well. That's all. I thought I waz gonna hear something weird! I thought it was gonna be hard! No sir! Not this time! Just a simple story of time borrowing!

I looked at Crissy & tried for words but ended up with whimper. She hugged me for a bit.

"What do I have to do?" I asked.

Crissy smiled a little. "Another guess?"

I nodded.

"Go to the City where Rich Americus lives. Help him out any way you can. Then have him help you bring Jones here."

By now I wasn't surprised anymore.

"OK," I said.

"You won't really be in danger, Algernon."

"OK," I said.

"Rich Americus is much bigger than Farmer Jones."

"OK," I said.

"And I will be watching you from here."

"OK!" I yelled 4or the only time ever I hope at Princess Crissy, & then I runned away. I even crashed over Boop as I runned. I kept going on mah short legs until I was back in Bags End, & I didn't stop until I was crawled through mah bedroom window, & onto mah very own personal Milne's Porch, & sitting in mah favorite comfy chair.

But I jumped out of it again, & hurried over to the scary railing & was started yelling & yelling.

O! Danger! Yuk!

O! Peril! Yuk!

O! Bravery! Yuk!

O! Pillows! Yuk!

YUK! YUK! YUK!

I yelled some more stuff but it was just like that stuff. I yelled until mah voice was wore out.

Then I sat down & stayed put for awhile.

Of course I had to go to Rich Americus's City & stop that bad Jones from time borrowing.

Of course this story was gonna go on & on.

But I decided to just sit 4or awhile. I had slept enough to satisfy even Ramie that Lazybug for a day or so.

I knew Crissy would 4orgive me for being rude & all.

Fooley.

Fooley.

Fooley.

FOOEY!

Time Soon 4or the City!

Usually I write mah stories about things which have already happened. But this time I am writing about right now, sitting in mah comfy chair on Milne's Porch. You see, I have to go to the City. Miss Chris told me that sometimes she would go there in a car, & also that both she & her brothers were borned there.

Still, it's a big place & I have to go there alone & I have only mah meager wits & Rich Americus to protect me. An Princess Crissy watching over me from Imagianna too.

I have to help Rich Americus not be so sad over the past. How am I supposed to do that? He is a big guy & I really don't know why he is sad.

And then he is supposed to help me find Farmer Jones & bring him back to Princess Crissy in Imagianna, so that she can make him put back the Stays-Is so Bunny Pillows will stop evolving like they are into the future & getting faces & all. Your small but gritty pal Algernon has to make all these big guys, nice & mean alike, do what I want.

An what happens next? Does Betsy have a face now? Will she come back to Bags End? What will happen to that bad guy Jones when he is brought back to Imaginanna?

An what about me? Will I cease mah doglike ways? Be beagle pure & simple again?

I don't know at all about these things. If I had never gone to the Bunny Pillow Pillow Free State, I wouldn't be barking & licking & wagging my tail like I do sometimes these days.

But what about Betsy? She is mah friend even if she doesn't like me much. An Miss Chris loves her a whole lot.

An what about Rich Americus? Why is he so sad? Can I really help him out?

The sky I see beyond Milne's Porch is blue & quiet. No weird visions or anything like that. I like it calm like this.

Sometimes mah life is calm. Sometimes it's not. 4or a long time lately it hasn't been calm at all.

But this is a calm time. I am in mah comfy chair & there is nobody around. I feel very beagle not dog at all.

But when I am alone like this, I don't really feel like any kind of thing. I am me. I think mah thoughts.

Maybe I am like Rich Americus a little cuz I think about the past too & get sad. Like mah longlost Mommy Beagle, & how she would call me SonnyBoy all nicely.

Princess Crissy explained to me with her pretty eyes that mah visit would not last very long & that I would be pure beagle the whole time for sure. I asked her how could this be so but her answer was a sort of tricky "you're so cute, Algernon" smile, not good old-fashioned words.

After so long of doing this adventure, it's hard to remember that not all Bags End stories go like this. Some are kind of nice or kind of funny even.

I don't really know what I want from all this anymore. I mean, I don't want Betsy to be unhappy, & Farmer Jones' mean plans to work, & I sure don't like mah own beaglestuff messed with, but after all that, what?

Can the place where the Bunny Pillows live be not a slave farm or a Free State? Is it possible 4or Jones to get defeated & then reform his ways? Isn't Betsy's home truly here in Bags End?

Shouldn't Betsy be near Miss Chris who has been her dearest friend since she escaped from the Bunny Pillow Farm? An who to keep Sheila's bullying ways in line better than Betsy?

If I am going to help beat Jones, don't I have to know mah own mind about this whole thing?

What if I don't beat Jones? What if he gets scared of Rich Americus & runs far away?

Why can't Betsy be King or whatever of the Bunny Pillow Free State, & still living in Bags End both? I miss her silly Pillow ways, & seeing Miss Chris take a nap on her as she sucks her thumb.

How confusing! Asking so many questions & no answers 4or miles! It's hard, this! It tries mah meager braveness! It robs mah rest from me! It makes me upset!

It's hard to squeeze much hero from a beagle such as me. I am pretty terrible at leading the charge. I would rather follow the charge & write it all down.

I would rather write shorter stories. I would rather have tricky plans that make no real trouble.

Just be4ore when I am supposed to be bravest, Dear Readers, I am most cowardest. I wish there was another way.

"Now, Sonnyboy, I don't want you to do poorly."

Hey! Is that you, Mommy Beagle?

"Yes, Sonnyboy."

Where are you?

"Close by."

"Why can't I see you?"

Because I am in your heartbone where you keep me."

O.

"Now listen, Sonnyboy, to the words of your long-gone but still-loved Mommy Beagle."

OK.

"Braveness is not something you feel like scaredness. Braveness is something you only know you had afterwards, when you think about it."

Really?

"Yes, Sonnyboy. It's true."

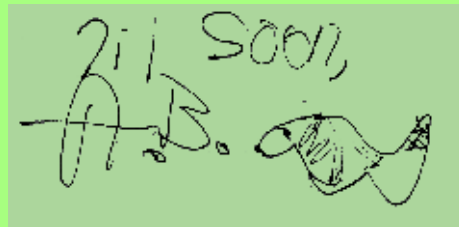
But how do I know I will do the right thing to help Betsy? An to help Rich Americus?

"The right thing to do is where I am, in your heartbone. Use that good brainbone of yours too."

OK. Um, thanks, Mommy Beagle.

"You're welcome, Sonnyboy. I love you."

I love you too.



So What Happened, Algernon?

Since mah episodes of going Dog were happening more & more, & who knew what kind of terrible things were happening to those poor Bunny Pillows with faces, there was no time to dawdle.

Princess Crissy & Miss Chris came to mah bedroom early one morning & waked me from mah safe, comfy sleep. First one girl would hug & kiss me, & then the other one would, & then they both did. I wish all days started this way!

Crissy & me started climbing through mah bedroom window to Milne's Porch, but Miss Chris didn't come.

"Come on!" I said all sleepy & friendly.

"I have to go get Sheila," she said. "She wanted to say goodbye to you, & give you some words of advice. But I better go alone cuz she's very grumpy when waked early."

"Hurry back, MC!" called Crissy.

"Who's that?" I demanded to know.

Crissy smiled nicely at me who was in her lap, & both of us in my comfy armchair. "M is for Miss, & C is for Chris. They're initials, get it?"

I didn't think I did, but maybe that was just being sleepy, but I nodded

anyway.

Crissy turned me so I could see the sky beyond Milne's Porch. It was very very pink.

Suddenly Crisy gathered me in her arms & hugged me very tight.

"You see that pink? That's my promise to you. As long as you see pink somewhere around you, it means I am nearby & you are safe."

Sometimes a magick girl like Crissy loves you so much it's almost scary.

Just then I heard a little swish of air & over Crissy's shoulder & into her lap hopped & landed Sheila Bunny.

She looked at me with her sleepy but intense purple eyes.

"Hi Sheila," said me, careful but friendly still.

"Algernon, I have something to say to you, so listen hard," she said.

I nodded.

Of course she didn't talk at that moment. Of course she had to pause all dramatically & look up at the pink sky with her purple eyes. I was tired of all this. It wasn't fun no more.

"You're a brave beagle. Good luck," she said, in words shorter than her short self.

Well, I got mad. Quite mad. "That's it? That's all? Boy, Sheila, thanks a lot! Should I get mah pencil & write all that down? Should I ask your real smart sister Lory what you mean?"

Sheila didn't try & pummel me as she usually does. She just talked some more. "I think Jones has done what he wanted to do. It will probably be harder 4or you to help Rich Americus with his problem than the other way."

I was quiet this time, in case of more words. Good move.

"But maybe he has one more trick up his sleeve. I don't know." And with that, Sheila nuzzled mah face in a sort of kiss, & said, "well, goodbye," & hopped back through the window.

So now it was me & Crissy again which I liked much better than talking & talking bunnys.

"Well, Algernon. It's almost time to go." Crissy smiled at me. "But one more person has to say goodbye to you."

"Not mah crazy kin?" I said suspiciously.

Crissy laughed & it was as pretty as wind through sleepy weeds.

"No!" she said.

"It's me!" said Miss Chris, as she climbed through the window.

Well, here again was a treat among treats. Crissy & Miss Chris sat together on mah comfy chair & I was shared on both their laps. Two laps to mahself!

I wondered when some laploving transgressing Bags End guy would come to share mah luxury.

Mah head was near Miss Chris & she skitched mah nosebone, & mah body was petted by Crissy. It was quite comfy. I thought maybe they would talk & tell me things like Sheila did. But they didn't.

No, not they. They hmmm'd to me instead, with no words. I never heard them sing together be4ore, & I was amazed. I think Miss Chris's voice was a little higher than Princess Crissy's, but it was hard to say cuz they sounded so much alike.

Now what happened next is so strange that I still don't get it. I mean, your old pal Algernon is a land-loving guy. I usually don't swim & I usually don't float or fly.

But I did. Which? Float, fly, or swim? you ask. I don't know, fella!

An get this crazy hat to set upon your head. Miss Chris & Princess

Crissy followed! We flyswimfloated into the thick pink sky beyond Milne's Porch. Miss Chris & Princess Crissy were behind me but I knew where they were cuz each girl was holding onto mah back legs.

We were all quiet as we went. The sky was very thick to the flyfloatswimming.

I knowed more than most things that all of this was OK tho because Princess Crissy had tolded me that the pink sky was her promise to me that I was safe & she was nearby.

Somehow I finally came to land tho it wasn't by going down but by going up more.

I am not sure when Miss Chris & Crissy went away. I found mahself near the ocean on one side, & the bottom of a hill on the other. An down the hill, rolling ever so slowly, was a really big man who didn't have no clothes on!

Into the City with Rich Americus!

So here I was on this pink beach place, wondering when the City moved to be near the ocean, & hoping that the big guy rolling down the hill nearby was that big guy Rich Americus.

He rolled very slowly. Was this cuz he had no clothes on? I didn't know.

Az he got closer, I could see that his eyes were tightly shut. It was Rich. Was he asleep? Was he doing that sleep-rolling game that Miss Chris & Ramie the Toy Tall Boy like to do on the lawn of Miss Chris's house?

Then he rolled to a stop & didn't move no more.

What to do? I waited. I waited some more. Nothing happened.

Finally I decided to do something, & hope I didn't end up demolished.

I went up a little near his face. "Are you asleep, fella?" asked me.

He shook his head, but didn't say no words.

"Didja 4orget how to speak English?" sayeth me some more.

He smiled a little with his eyes still shut, & shook his head.

This was not going very well. "Are you a Lazybug then?" I asked. He did look a little like Ramie.

"No," he said out loud. And now he opened his eyes.

He looked at me be9ly, but like he didn't know mah name. He sat up.

So here was a funny conundrum. Rich Americus was supposed to help me & I was supposed to help him, but I don't think he knowed me!

What would a brave fella do? Slap Rich around? But how would that help?

I decided to do the bravest thing mah heartbone said. Rich is very nice & he didn't look mad or nothing. So I climbed up onto his leg & looked with all mah hope into his face. An talked too. Shot through beagle courage, that's me.

"I was waiting for you. I'm glad you came."

Rich looked at me but his memories of me were still hiding out. He looked curious tho so I talked some more.

"You need all the friends you can get," said I.

"I do?"

"An I am going to help you. I need to find someone, & you're looking for something. So we will be partners. That's what I thought."

"O."

"We should go now, pal." Mah basin of brave was getting empty fast.

Bag's End News
No. 261 October 21, 1995
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Intoo the Citee with Rich Amerikus!

So heer I waz on this pink
beech plas wumring wen the
Citee moovd too bee neer the
ashen an hoping mor that the big
gy roling foun the bil behind me
was that big gy Rich Amerikus.
He rollid verree slolee. Waz this
cuz he had no cloths on? I dont'
no.

Az. he got clast I cood see
that hiz ippz wer fiffie shot.
Waz he asleep? Waz he dooing
that sleep'illling gam that Mees
Chrees an Ramy the Toye tawl Boye
lik too doo on the laun of Mees
Chreeses' Conetikut hows?

Then he rollid too a stoo an

Bag's End News
No. 262 October 28, 1995
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

A Storee Told at the Citee Libarey

Theer sat me an Rich Amerikus
an thiz uthr gy whoo lookd lik a
reel old Ramy at a tabel in a rum
ful of growdup books in the Citee Libaree.

Rich waz teltng thiz long storee
of his old days siting at this tabel
an making up muzik for hiz Noizee
Childrin 'n'k' group.

He sed "I Kam heer in the sumer
of 81 too werk an Noizee Childrins'
muzikel Tapdancing in the Mindfeels."

"Weed" reeleesd our ferst rekard,
Fory Tayls" but we hadent gon an fur
yet. I bona, tee didnt lik loozing her
howz bano too a fer, mebbe for good. We
wad a deele shean-I. I cooder gon
enyway becuz we had no Kontrakt

Bag's End News
No. 263 November 4, 1995
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

A Storee Told at Simint Park

I gess that in a way
Shlela Bunny waz rite wen she
told me that this storee haz
gon on too long. But wats' a
beagleboye jernelist gy too doo?
A storee haz too bee told evin if
it's verree long an whoo noz wen
it wil kwit an go home.

Enyway, thiz wuns' up too the
part weer me an Rich Amerikus
an this strang oldr gy whoo looks
lik Mees Chreeses' old broth Ramy
the Toye Tawl boy went into Simint
Park wich iz weer Rich met hiz
dawtr Rebekuh wen she waz az
lited az Mees Chrees!

Itz hard too deescrib it eksept

Bag's End News
No. 264 November 11, 1995
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Pasing Frum Park into Strangr Stil

I hav no douts that the strangst
part of mah longlong storee is stil
kuming. It wil seem too yu deer
reedrs, lik awl the weerdnes so far
haz jest bin praktis for wats' nekt.

Enyway, theer waz me an mah
big untamd lik Shlela frend Rich
Amerikus an theez tawking statooz
in thiz plas cawld Simint Park in
the Citee.

Rich had jest finishd reading
thiz plak that told awl about
the statoo an at the end it sed
April 1, 1964.

Nowe remembr lik I warnd
yu that I waz in to storees at
wuns' theer. The ferst was mah

"Where?"

"Good question," I said. "Back to the City. Down there," I continued before an honest "I don't know" could pop out of mah mouth. The funny thing is that I found mahself making Rich look way down the beach toward the City way down there!

"OK," he said. How agreeable. Of course he does live there.

I noticed again that he had no clothes on, & no things with him at all.

"By the way, where's your pen & paper to write down your adventures?" I asked, cuz Rich always has clothes on when he visits Bags End, an he has Galleons Lap book & a pen too.

"Someone else does that for me," he said. What does that mean?

"Does someone else do your music for you too?" I asked suspiciously. After all, what did I know about Rich & his life in the City?

"No!" he said firmly.

"Good. Now hup 2, fella," said me, wondering at mah boldness.

Rich carried me facing forward down the hill into the City, & it was early morning time.

"Were you borned here?" said me all friendly again.

"Yes."

"Do you like it?"

We were now on a big street in front of a building that had pictures of books on it. Rich helded me nicely & skritchd mah headbone.

"If I didn't have a memory, I wouldn't. If I didn't have a memory, I wouldn't be in love with all that is absent here. If I didn't have a memory, it wouldn't mean too much to me."

I could see Rich was getting sad, so I said, "What's this place?"

"The library."

I got excited. "O! I like picture books, ya know. Or stories if some big guy reads them to me. I'm kind of illiterate, ya know."

"Would you like to hear a story?" said Rich & smiling.

"Yes!" quoth me.

Rich gaved me a nice hug but didn't do no words. We went up some steps & through an open area to the library's door.

The funny thing is that when we were in the library, Rich had blue jeans & a shirt on him. I wondered if some magick guy like Princess Crissy or the Blondys were nearby.

"It was the place where I would to go map out what I wanted Noisy Children to do," he said.

We were through the entrance & into a room inside. We passed by a man that reminded me of a short bullfroggy with thick eyebrows. This room had a lot of tables in it, & bookcases with lots of books along the wall. I tried to see everything so that I would remember later what it looked like.

There were metal boxes, big ones, at one end of the room & weird machines that flashed pictures & things that looked like TVs on the other end. I guessed it was some kind of growed-up library. I betted there weren't no good books like Wizard of Oz or Peter Pan in this room.

Rich brought me to a table near the end of the room. He put me on the table & satted down.

The funniest thing was there was this other guy at the table who looked sorta like Ramie the Toy Tall Boy who is Miss Chris's brother!

But he wasn't no Ramie. He was a lot older & he was too awake. An he was writing something which I guess Ramie does too but he uses a pencil usually & this old fella had a black pen.

He looked friendly enough, tho, & he was smiling kind of shyly at me.

So I took a chance.

"Hi, fella," said I.

"Hi," said he.

Rich looked at this guy but didn't say nothing.

Rich pointed to the large lamps in the ceiling. "The lamps look naked now without their circles, just bulbs hanging from huge fixtures awkwardly."

Then he pointed to the windows high up in the walls. "Gives you a nice shot of the outside light without distracting."

"Is this room special to you?" I asked.

Rich nodded & then he started to tell a long story.

A Story Told at the City Library

So there sat me & Rich Americus & this other guy who liked like a much older grewup Ramie at a table in a room full of grewup books in the City Library.

Rich was telling this long story of his old days sitting at this table & making up music 4or his Noisy Children rock group.

He said, "I came here in the summer of 1981 to work on Noisy Children's musical called Tapdancing in the Mindfields.

"We'd released our first record, Fairy Tales, but we hadn't gone on tour yet. Luna T, the owner of the Cafe we always play at, didn't like losing her house band to a tour, & maybe 4or good. So we made a deal, she & I. I could've gone anyway, because we had no contract. I hadn't renewed the one we had because I wanted to see how our record would do.

"Anyway, I wasn't going to leaver her high & dry 4or a tour that might go nowhere. So our deal was if the single, 'Can You Hear the Silence?', gets into the Top 40, she'll let us go on a 6-month tour, & we'll return after that & renegotiate on what happened.

"It took that song all summer to make it. Meantime I'm into our next project. I worked on it here at this table in the mornings before our daily afternoon show at Luna T's."

"You performed your musical at least once, didn't you? For a crowd of 3 or something, right?" asks the old Ramie-looking guy.

Rich gaved him a mean Sheila-like look & talked some more. "I came up with the final scene here, but could never get everything leading up to it right.

"It was an overcast wickedly humid day. Rain had to be coming. I was sitting here lost in my notes, lyric sheets, & all.

"Then the storm hit. A real hard one. Those windows up there flashed white with lightning just about every second it seemed.

"Looking up from my notes, I found myself in the midst of this event. I got up & wandered around the library into the general book room behind us, & the business & technology section which is behind the microfilm readers.

"There were people groupled at every window on the floor watching the storm quietly. I joined one of the groups & we watched the rain pummel the pavement, the cars go by with their rain wipers going wildly, the wind batting the trees around. It was wondrous to see."

Rich stopped 4or a minute & I thought he was done, but his eyes were strange & he was petting me nicely on mah back, but not paying attention. He talked a little more.

"I knew that should be the last scene, but it never came together."

Rich got up suddenly & picked me up & he walked us toward the exit. Then he stopped & looked around him, & tho I am a simple beagle mahself, it looked like he was a calendar set 40r years ago. He looked at all the fancy machines & books but his face was full of remembering eyes.

Then he floated us up into the air like he a very tall redheaded Blondy & together we floated away from the exit & into a room with a lot of books but not many tables or chairs as his favorite room. I kept quiet cuz Richy's float was that kind of float.

We floated up to the ceiling & through it to the next floor! It was another room filled with books but I don't this is what interested him so much. No, cuz he floated to a far end of the room where 4 brown doors next to each other led to 4 tiny little booths. I saw old ritetypers in the rooms, just like mine!

Rich stared at these booths 40r a long time, saying nothing very sadly.

I guessed that it was time for your old braveless pal Algernon to talk words & bring Rich's calendar face back to now.

"We have to go, Rich," quoth me.

"Taken away with no return," he growled dangerously.

Ut-o. Rich was getting too Sheila-like in his mien. "I'm sorry, fella," I said.

"Taken away, so nobody knows & nothing good in their place," said Rich. I sneakily double-checked to make sure he didn't have purple eyes.

I had to think fast cuz if Rich was anything like Sheila, except a lot bigger, trouble would be fast to come & slow to go. I would calm Sheila down with talk of jazz. What did he like the way she likes jazz?

Wait a minute, thinketh me. That place which is like a park & a sidewalk together. Where he first met his daughter Rebecca.

"Could you please show me Cement Park? You know, the place with those old statues?"

It worked! Rich's face got soft & we even stopped floating. Holding me nice & careful, he took us down a eletaker & we left through the front door the regular fella way.

Well, Dear Readers, the story he told of long ago just kept going & got even longer & weirder.

That old Ramie-looking guy sort of followed us out the library's door. His face looked all upset.

"This story sucks, doesn't it?" he said, looking at his notebook with a sad look.

Rich ignored the old Ramie guy except 40r kind of moving his shoulders up & down a little.

Now what story was he writing? I had kinda guessed that this must be the guy who wriedt down Rich's adventures. I never had seen any of these stories because Sheila told me they were 40r growedups who could read really good. I asked Sheila if they were like the books in the library with no pictures & she nodded.

"No, it doesn't, old Ramie guy. It's really good," said me. How would I know?

"No, it's not," said the old Ramie guy. He was really upset now.

I nudged Rich to turn me so I could see the old Ramie guy more clearly. I said what I could. "Some stories are harder to tell than others. Some are more fun than others, I have that happen too. You have to just keep going & see what happens. That's what I do," I said all longly.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I am very sure. It will be different after awhile. I promise. One

story can be many different ways before it's done. Maybe this is the hardest part."

Old Ramie looking guy's eyes were closing just like Miss Chris's younger Ramie's does. Rich started us walking again.

I yelled back, "It'll get better, old Ramie looking guy! Promise!"

"What do you think, Americus?" called the old Ramy guy.

"I think my little friend here sounds pretty convincing."

What a doubt-filled, fear-frighted, furry mite of a beagle was doing in the middle of all this talk will forever elude me. But there I was, & so.

A Story Told at the Cement Park

I guess in a way Sheila Bunny was right when she told me that this story has gone on too long. But what's a beagleboy journalist to do? A story has to be told even if it's very long & who knows when it will quit & go home.

Anyway, this one's up to the part where me & Rich Americus & this strange old guy who looks like Miss Chris's older brother Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, but isn't, & he writes down Rich's stories too, went into Cement Park, which is where Rich met his daughter Rebecca when she was as little as Miss Chris!

It's a hard park to describe except to say it's like it's name, all cement, except for some small trees scattered around it, & a pretty fountain in the back, & some old statues of a strangely dressed family of people-folks too. Rich & me in his arms walked over to the statues of these guys that I remember Mister Owl mah teacher called Pilgrims & said they sailed over the Wide Wide Sea from England & found what they called the New World, & in it they started up New England. In there is Connecticut, where Miss Chris lives & in her house is where sits Bags End. That's a lot!

"Can we talk to them, Richy?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"They're statues."

"So?"

"Statues don't talk."

I looked over at the old Ramie looking guy & said, "I wonder if having that Ramie looking guy along would help us to have better luck." So I took a big breath & looked up at those big people-folks statues & summoned up my cup of brave to say, "Hi, statues!" I called.

No reply. "O, rats!" said me.

"Sorry," said the old Ramie looking guy.

"That's OK, pal," said me.

"I have to recede now, OK?" he said.

Now I didn't know what that word meant but he didn't look dangerous, so I said, "OK."

"But here's a tip. Have Americus bring you over to the wall behind the statues. There's a placque there he & you should read. I think it will help you. Seeya."

"Seeya, guy," sayeth me.

Richy & me went over to the placque which I guess means sign since that is what was on the wall behind the statues. It was old looking & green, & I think it had English words on it, but I didn't know many of them.

"Can you read it to me, pal? I'm kind of illiterate, ya know," said me.

Richy read the words but it almost sounded like singing too.

"In June 1636, about 100 members of Thomas Hooker's congregation arrived safely in this vicinity. With 160 cattle, they had followed old Indian trails from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the Connecticut River, to build a new community. Here they established the form of government upon which the present Constitution of the United States is modeled.

"Their deeply held religious principles found expression in the emblem & the motto of the seal which the colony soon adopted. The seal of the state of Connecticut still bears the transplanted grapevines--"

"O! Grapes! Yuk!" yelled me & I leaped from Richy's arms & started to flee.

I didn't get too far before even stranger things than that bad plaque started happening. The air in the park began to get pink. The statues got really pink too! Was this Crissy's message to me? I decided that hiding in a big guy's arms was a good idea & I ran back to Richy's arms. Those statues weren't old & green no more. They were see-through color.

Richy only added sunshine & lots of water to mah fears' healthy growth by bringing me over to see the front of the statues.

I tried to be brave & look at them. They were a family of Pilgrims, like I said already. A daddy kneeling down & holding a big hat & a old book. A mommy in a long dress & a scarf on her neck, & she was holding a baby in her arms. She held onto the shoulder of a little girl who looked a little like Miss Chris, except Miss Chris isn't clear-colored. The girl had on a long dress too which is more like what Princess Crissy sometimes has to wear when her friend Boop wants her looking all princess-like for some reason. The little girl statue was also holding a rope attached to a lamb, but this is definitely not like Crissy, who would never put a rope on a friend of hers or anyone else either.

All these words in a long tumble means I was crazyscared. I looked at the old Ramie looking guy, or where he had been, & yelled, "Hey! You! Is mah fear to go ignored?"

The mommy statue moved her head to look down at me & talked. "Hush, small mongrel, & continue your study of our commemorative plaque."

Well, I knowed mongrel is a mean word cuz Sheila calls me that when she is mad.

"I'm no mongrel, you, you, you, statue, you!" I yelled. I was so mad I forgot I was scared & it took a lot of scratching mah head by Richy for me to calm down again.

He brought us back to the plaque & read some more. "And the legend Que Transtulit Sustinet."

"What language is that?" I demanded. I hoped it wasn't Bump's cousin language.

"I think it's Latin," said Rich quietly.

"Tis," said that statue daddy. "An you'll find its English meaning beneath our feet."

Back to the statues. Rich pointed to some words below the Pilgrims' feet. "The statue is called Safe Arrival, & that Latin means 'He who brought us here sustains us still.'"

"He who?" demandeth me.

"Why, the Lord Our God Christ," said the little girl statue with a smile that made me think of Miss Chris again.

Rich walked over to the plaque to read some more, I guess.

"This statue honoring the spirit of all pioneers is dedicated to the founders of the City. It commemorates the beginning of the second century of service by the Bluebird Insurance Company. April 1, 1964."

Passing from the Park into Strange Still

I have no doubts that the strangest part of my long long story is still coming. It will seem to you, Dear Readers, like all the weirdness so far has just been practice for what's next.

Anyway, there was me & mah big untamed like Sheila friend Rich Americus & these talking statues in this place called Cement Park in the City.

Rich had just finished reading this placque that told all about the statue & at the end it said April 1, 1964. Just then this church across the street rang its bell to tell the time, & when I stopped listening to it, the pinkish air of the park was gone, & the statues were green & old & stiff like always again! Too bad! I liked them.

Richy lifted me up to look at his face. "It was all a revelation but I don't know what it fully meant."

"Can't help you, pal," said me.

Then we left Cement Park.

Don't ask me cuz I don't know, but next thing I know I wasn't in Rich's hands no more. I was in that pretty girl Rebecca's! She looks like Miss Chris but she is older, I don't know, maybe 20 or 15 or something.

Rebecca has a nice smile & she was holding me softly. We were in some big guy's house, maybe in Connecticut, & Rebecca was holding me while standing outside a door. She stood there real quietly for a long time, listening. I didn't hear nothing except maybe someone asleep in a bed, and moving around a little.

Finally she peeked in & talked nicely.

"Dad?"

"Come in, beautiful," said the voice of Rich Americus. So we in his house!

Rebecca went into the room with me & we were hugged by Rich who is really tall. He sat up in his bed & holded us close.

"How are you, Beckah?" I thinked he meant Rebeccca here but I looked around to be sure. Yep. Sure. I guess.

"OK. I was reading."

"Reading what?"

"It's a book called Papa by Suzie Clemens. Her father's Mark Twain & she wrote this book when she was 14." I didn't see it be4ore but now she had a book she was showing & it had a picture of a girl on its cover that looked a little like Rebecca. Was this Beckah? No, I don't think so.

"Is it good?"

"She loved him a lot. She died young & he wrote about the book after that."

"What's that look 4or?" said Rich. Mah face was down so I couldn't see.

"Nothing."

"What are you up to?"

"Nothing!"

"O. OK."

"You're giving up that easy?"

"Listen, you're becoming a young adult. Secrets from me are natural."

"Now don't ask me what this was all about. It was people-folks stuff & so foreign to me. Next thing I knew Rebecca was up & walking to a rocking chair & then rocking & skritchng mah head but not happy. Rocking too slow & skritchng too fast.

"Rebecca?" said Rich.

She said no words.

"Rebby?" Rich said & I thinked her still meant her.

I guess he got mad at all those no words cuz I heard him get up & walk out.

She rocked 4or awhile more & then stopped. I am quite sure I like Bags End fights better when nobody really means it usually, & there's a lot of hugs & kisses in there somewhere, & naps & music & the better kind of head skitching.

Then she got up & ran into another room I think looking for Rich. She found in another room a piece of paper with words. I think she read it twice cuz because she looked at it a long time. Then she walked to one of the rooms we had gone into already & we sat in a big old green chair.

She really surprised me next by falling asleep! Is she that Lazybug Ramie's cousin or something?

A lot of time passed & she slept. I thought a lot of things but they were all like apple trees with no apples.

Then Rich Americus came back & he put a cover on Rebecca after picking me up. We sat on the couch, me in his lap, & we talked.

"I have to leave soon, Richy. I have to go home," said me.

"I know."

"We're not done yet tho."

"We're not?"

"No!"

"You're looking for someone, right?"

"Right."

"And?"

"And I haven't really helped you much."

"It's been fun though."

"Are you serious or funny?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I can't go yet. There's more."

"OK."

Then Rebecca woked up & Rich went over to her so fast & loving, & I thinked maybe their terrible fight was over.

Read Part 4 in [Cenacle](#) | 100 | June 2017!



* * * * *





Jimmy Heffernan

Lost Truth

I've misplaced my truth
 I do not know how
 It was here yesterday
 And it is gone now

It was so sublime
 And succinct and correct
 Where did it go?
 I failed to protect

A magical act
 I assure you it was
 One minute existing
 The next aether fuzz

I'm still very bothered
 I cannot forget!
 Whatever did happen
 I'm in cosmic debt

As the Gods of truth saw this
 And rectified quick
 They restored all my losses
 And laid it back thick

There is here a moral
 Though it's rather abstruse
 Do not lose your truths, man
 Or for you there's no use!

* * *

The Telepath

Networks silent screaming
Centers moving dreaming
Extrasensory motherboard
Circuits fairly gleaming

The middle of attention
Visual distension
Eyes play tricks, eye it's thick
Electrical dimension

Frames moving together
Not really knowing whether
One is moving both or if
There is some sort of tether

Candidate shows symptoms
Indications of rhythms
Finishing another's sentences
Perceptual sheer prisms

In advancing stages
(Like one finds among sages)
Phenomena shift rapidly
A higher realm engages

The future holds the answers for
The questions coming through the door
We do not know for certain what
It means, but we'll know more

* * *

Fleeting

The tragedy of life, it seems
Is that it's mostly boring
At its peaks it surely gleams
But mostly, we're abhorring

Ordinariness is king
And tedium its queen
Magic fleeting, feel the sting
Reality is mean

* * * * *





Hartley's Righteous Rants

As for the Pyramids, there is nothing to wonder at in them so much as the fact that so many men could be found degraded enough to spend their lives constructing a tomb for some ambitious booby, whom it would have been wiser and manlier to have drowned in the Nile, and then given his body to the dogs. I might possibly invent some excuse for them and him, but I have no time for it. As for the religion and love of art of the builders, it is much the same all the world over, whether the building be an Egyptian temple or the United States Bank.

It costs more than it comes to. The mainspring is vanity.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854.

Space Aliens & Bigfoot are Demons

I've reached a conclusion. A unified field theory of sorts.

Based on my research, experience, deep thought, and analysis on what the fuck is really going on . . . Well, I think I've figured it out. Staring me in the face the whole time.

It's Satan.

Seriously. I mean demons. *Real fucking demons.*

My clearest, most objective assessment of the world, and on down to individuals, is that demons are real and, yes, that's *plural*.

I'm practically an atheist and libertarian. I'm a scientist, objectivist. As a general rule, I don't believe in non-physical things. My confirmation bias is opposite of my conclusion. That's why I couldn't see it. I think that's why almost nobody else can see it either.

I am aware of the philosophical trap of evil sourcing. I'm not being philosophical at all. Not talking about evil or sin. That's a side effect.

I know I can't prove demons exist to other people. I can make a plausible case but I haven't captured a demon for proof, yet.

I am deliberately not defining the term "demons." I think it's vaguely analogous to gravity, in the sense that its real force by measurement, but it's a result of mass curving space/time, so not a "real thing."

Or perhaps it's of a more organic nature, like brain parasites or space aliens. I don't know exactly what it is but, like a dairy farmer whose cows are spooked, and not giving milk, he knows *something is happening*.

* * *

I think there are other peoples than we contemporary Westerners that know a great deal about demons. We are the only people in history of humanity not to see demons as real. *Are we in denial?* Has science put that superstition to bed, or simply covered up something that doesn't fit the desired model? I'm coming at this as a scientist. There is more credibility given to space aliens and Bigfoot than demons, which is interesting in itself.

I am fairly knowledgeable on cults and mind control, things like hypnosis, drugs,

electro-magnetics, propaganda, etc. And I think I have a pretty good sense for “indoctrinated” thinking and logical fallacies. We all have these aspects, but I’m seeing a whole other level happening, and I’m wondering if the ancients were right and we are not looking deeply enough into the shadows.

* * *

I often wondered about why the American South was so religious. Well, from what I can gather, it’s not as pro-Jesus as it is anti-demon. It’s interesting that Jesus as protector and warrior against Satan is very prominent in the American South. *Perhaps they know something the rest of us don’t?*

* * *

Consider the Aztecs. From what I read about them, they were full-on demonic. I guess cutting out hearts by the thousands as offerings has a social function, *but really?* It’s fucking demons. Mayans, Incas, demons.

Was it the drugs? I don’t know, but it’s hard to reason out because they were an organized and complex society, *and apparently out of their minds.*

How did Montezuma and the priests all know Cortes was coming, and then went out to meet him? How did they know a red-bearded white guy was coming in a big boat? Why did they believe Cortes was a type of god sent to deliver all good things, when in reality he was their doom?

Fucking demons. Cortes totally possessed. Montezuma likewise. Then it all makes sense.

* * * * *



Joe Coleman**Timid**

I drank her in with thirsty eyes
as someone held her by the waist,
and trespassed on my reverie-romance.

Nonchalant in faceless guise,
almost choking on the taste,
I wished I had the nerve to risk a chance.

The music played.
The night grew long.
The deejay spun one final song.
She looked my way, but just a glance.
I shyly smiled and never made advance.

I knew when it came time to go,
it might have been but, sadly, no
—for when I move, I move too slow.

I sat and watched her dance.

It was a pleasant evening, though;
rooted where wallflowers grow,
I merely watched her dance.

I merely watched her dance.

* * * * *





The Psychedelic Miracle

[Essay]

This article first appeared in Rolling Stone on March 9, 2017.

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/how-doctors-treat-mental-illness-with-psychedelic-drugs-w470673>

Dr. X is a dad. Appropriately—boringly—at 4:37 p.m. on a national holiday, he is lighting a charcoal grill, about to grab a pair of tongs with one hand and a beer with the other. His kids are running around their suburban patio, which could be anywhere; Dr. X, though impressively educated now, grew up poor in a town that is basically nowhere. Like most Americans, he is a Christian. Like a lot of health-conscious men, he fights dad bod by working out once or twice a week, before going into his medical practice.

Somewhat less conventionally, two hours ago, he was escorting a woman around his yard, helping her walk off a large dose of MDMA. He's the one who'd given it to her, earlier in the morning, drugging her out of her mind.

This would be psychedelic-assisted therapy, the not-new but increasingly popular practice of administering psychotropic substances to treat a wide range of physical, psychological, and psycho-spiritual concerns. "Some people stagger out" of the room in Dr. X's home that he uses for these "journeys," as sessions are called in the semiofficial parlance. Some have to stay for hours and hours beyond the standard five or so, crying or waiting to emotionally rebalance, lying on a mattress, probing the secrets, trauma, belief, or grief buried in their subconscious.

Dr. X recalls a patient who was considering a round-the-clock Klonopin prescription for anxiety; she reluctantly decided to try a journey instead. On the "medicine," she spent seven hours unraveling ballistically, picturing herself dumping sadness out of her chest into a jade box that she put a golden heart-shaped lock on and tossed into the sea. She'd been skeptical going in, but after it was over, Dr. X says, "She was so angry that it was illegal."

Because Dr. X's hallmark treatment—an MDMA session or two, then further journeys with psilocybin mushrooms if called for—is, absolutely, illegal. MDMA is a Schedule I controlled substance. Psilocybin is as well. Exposure could get his medical license suspended, if not revoked, along with his parental rights, or freedom. "This should be a part of health care, and is a true part of health care," he says in his defense.

The oversimplified concept behind MDMA therapy, which causes intense neurotransmitter activity including the release of adrenaline and serotonin (believed to produce positive mood), is that it tamps down fear, allowing people to interact with—and deal with—parts of their psyche they otherwise can't. Psychedelics in general are thought to bring an observational part of the ego online to allow a new perspective on one's self and one's memories, potentially leading to deep understanding and healing.

As an internal-medicine specialist, Dr. X doesn't have any patients who come to him seeking psychotherapy. But the longer he does the work, the more "I'm seeing that consciousness correlates to disease," he says. "Every disease." Narcolepsy. Cataplexy. Crohn's. Diabetes—one patient's psychedelic therapy preceded a 30 percent reduction in fasting blood-sugar levels. Sufferers of food allergies discover in their journeys that they've been internally attacking themselves.

"Consciousness is so vastly undervalued," Dr. X says. "We use it in every other facet in our life and esteem the intellectual part of it, but deny the emotional or intuitive part of it." Psychedelic therapy

“reinvigorated my passion and belief in healing. I think it’s the best tool to achieving well-being, so I feel morally and ethically compelled to open up that space.”

Currently—legally—we’re in the midst of a psychedelic renaissance. New York University, the University of New Mexico, the University of Zurich, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Alabama, and the University of California-Los Angeles have all partnered with the psilocybin-focused Heffter Research Institute, studying the compound for smoking cessation, alcoholism, terminal-cancer anxiety, and cocaine dependence; the biotech-CEO-founded Usona Institute funds research of “consciousness-expanding medicines” for depression and anxiety at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Since 2000, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a nonprofit based in Santa Cruz, California, has been funding clinical trials of MDMA for subjects with PTSD, mostly veterans, but also police, firefighters and civilians. In November, the FDA approved large-scale Phase III clinical trials—the last phase before potential medicalization—of MDMA for PTSD treatment.

MAPS, which has committed \$25 million to achieving that medicalization by 2021, also supports or runs research with ayahuasca (a concoction of Amazonian plants), LSD, medical marijuana, and ibogaine (the pharmaceutical extract of the psychoactive African shrub iboga). The organization is additionally funding a study of MDMA for treating social anxiety in autistic adults, currently underway at UCLA Medical Center. Another study, using MDMA to treat anxiety in patients with life-threatening illnesses, has concluded.

“If we didn’t have some idea about the potential importance of these medicines, we wouldn’t be researching them,” says Dr. Jeffrey Guss, psychiatry professor at NYU Medical Center and co-investigator of the NYU Psilocybin Cancer Project. “Their value has been written about and is well known from thousands of years of recorded history, from their being used in religious and healing settings. Their potential and their being worthy of exploration and study speaks for itself.”

Optimistic insiders think that if all continues to go well, within 10 to 15 years some psychedelics could be legally administrable to the public, not just for specific conditions but even for personal growth. In the meantime, says Rick Doblin, MAPS’ executive director, “there are hundreds of therapists willing to work with illegal Schedule I psychedelics” underground, like Dr. X. They’re in Florida, Minnesota, New York, California, Colorado, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New England, Kentucky. “Hundreds in America,” he says, though they’re “spread out all over the world.”

As within any field, underground practitioners vary in quality, expertise, and method. Some are M.D.s, like Dr. X, or therapists, and some are less conventionally trained. They don’t all use the same substances, and don’t necessarily use just one. Some work with MDMA or psilocybin or ayahuasca, which has become trendy to drink in self-exploration ceremonies all over the country; others administer 5-MeO-DMT, extracted from a toad in the Sonoran Desert, or iboga or ibogaine, which, according to the scant research that exists, may be one of the most effective cures for opiate addiction on the planet—but may also cause fatal heart complications.

“Psychedelic therapy reinvigorated my belief in healing,” says one physician.

* * *

Underground psychedelic therapists are biased toward their preferred medicines, and those they think work best for particular indications. But they are united by true belief.

“People that are involved are risking their careers, their freedom, in order to help others achieve a certain emotional freedom, and they disagree with prohibition,” says Doblin. “The fact that people are willing to do these therapies at great personal risk says something about what they think the potential of these drugs actually is to enhance psychotherapy.”

There are limitations. Psychedelics aren’t for everyone. Or at all foolproof. Nary a researcher

or provider, under- or above-ground, fails to point out that some pre-existing conditions make them inappropriate for use, and that though the dangers don't rise nearly to the level of Drug War mythology (iboga/ibogaine is the major exception), adverse outcomes do happen. The toxicity of ayahuasca is on par with codeine—though codeine causes many thousands more deaths per year. Psilocybin's is even less.

Some studies have found brain damage in chronic Ecstasy users but, in 2010, researchers at Harvard Medical School studied a large sample of Mormons who used Ecstasy—which the LDS Church was late to ban—but no other drugs or alcohol, and failed to find cognitive consequences; safety studies of the dosages used in MDMA therapy have found no evidence of neurotoxicity or permanent changes in serotonin transporters. LSD does not stay in your body forever (its half-life is a matter of hours).

But behaviorally, people on Ecstasy have died from heatstroke, or drinking too much or not enough water at raves; there have been assaults and even a murder at ayahuasca ceremonies for foreigners in Peru, which has seen a massive tourism boom around the substance's popularity. Probably the most common concern, the specter of “freaking out” during or long after a bad trip, has yet to happen in any of the clinical trials—though it's not unusual for subjects to have tough experiences in their journeys.

Dr. Charles Grob, a professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral science at UCLA, who has conducted studies with MDMA, ayahuasca, and psilocybin, says that's a function of screening, preparation, and expert support. “This is serious medicine with a capital M,” he says, “and if you don't watch yourself, and you don't pay attention to the essential basics, you could be in for a very difficult time.”

Even under the best of circumstances, the process catalyzed by psychedelic therapy is often far from painless. “It's definitely not that people just get blissed out and it gets better,” says Dr. Michael Mithoefer, the lead clinician on the MDMA trials in Charleston, South Carolina (others are ongoing in Boulder, Colorado; Canada; and Israel). “It makes the healing process possible, not easy.”

When you take 125 milligrams of pure MDMA, enough to nearly immobilize you, and someone invites you to take a look at your deepest self, “it *is* a destabilizing agent,” Dr. X cautions. But it's purposefully so. “It opens us,” he says. “Sometimes the medicine can stabilize someone in a difficult situation. Sometimes it stirs up madness, so they can process that. Some people feel rejuvenated and ready to go back into their lives, but other people feel frazzled, spent, fragmented. I've had a few people say, ‘That shattered who I thought I was.’”

Limitations and challenges aside, the evidence so far still makes researchers cautiously optimistic that psychedelics hold potential for great healing and change. If they're right, medicalization could address the deficits in treatment options for afflictions—trauma, depression, anxiety, addiction—that collectively impact millions of Americans, and ultimately shape our world.

“If we move forward and understand that these substances should only be used under optimal conditions,” says Grob, “it will have a positive impact on an individual, family, collective, and societal level.” In above-ground clinical trials like his, subjects routinely report that psychedelic therapy is among the top five most important experiences of their lives, akin to the birth of a child.

We've been here before. From the 1950s to the early Seventies, more than 40,000 cases of psychedelic treatment were studied in 1,000 different papers in the medical literature, covering everything from addiction to PTSD to OCD to antisocial disorders and autism. Despite encouraging results, says Grob, the “wild, uninhibited enthusiasm of the Sixties” contributed to some bad recreational outcomes that gave legislators ammunition to ban psychedelics from research for decades.

But as the above-ground movement has again been picking up steam, so is the underground. More positive studies get published; more patients and doctors read them; more underground success stories spread through word of mouth. “The secret is out,” says Grob, and, perhaps combined with depression and opiate overdoses at all-time highs, skyrocketing civilian and veteran suicide rates, and trends toward personal optimization and wellness, demand is increasing.

Researchers at NYU, UCLA, and Johns Hopkins all stressed that they cannot and do not ever work with people in the underground, but some of them admired the willingness of certain health care professionals to act, however illegally, on their belief that sometimes healing can't wait and that psychedelics are imperative to it.

"I respect that in them," NYU's Guss says. "I really do. I've become a member of the most established establishment. And so in a way, we're isolated from all the wisdom and knowledge in the underground community." That vast, uncollected experience contains details about the medicines' potential and pitfalls, challenges and inconsistencies—the variety of ways psychedelics might wholly, drastically change a life. "I'm very interested to learn," Guss says, "what underground psychedelic psychotherapists have to teach us."

* * *

My first introduction to underground psychedelic therapy was when, years ago, a doctor told me my vagina was depressed. I'd gone in for a pelvic exam because something felt wrong; at the follow-up appointment, when my test results were all negative and my answers to her hundred questions about the post-traumatic stress disorder I was in treatment for were all related to sexual threats and reporting on sexual violence, she said my genitals were just fucking bummed out.

This was San Francisco, and I did a lot of yoga; but even I rolled my eyes at the idea that my privates had an emotional disorder. I was very intrigued, however, when the doctor said she knew a therapist who could heal years of trauma in one five-hour swoop, so long as I had the secret password. The doctor gave me the number for that therapist—who worked with MDMA.

I never called. I moved across the country. Years later, I was on vacation on the coast when my husband went out for a run, and I stayed behind and may or may not have contemplated suicide.

OK. I did. In the car, on the road, running an errand, I thought about driving off the edge of a cliff into the brilliant, crashing Pacific.

Yes, I had a history: the PTSD, with concomitant major depressive disorder, suicidal thoughts. On my official paperwork, I was technically permanently disabled, but I had been doing much better—working, going to karaoke, having a life. I had backslides and big episodes, but if my "issues" were not exactly handled, they were at least on a general upswing thanks to years of constant treatment.

But then, the night before my drive, I had started yelling in a restaurant, feeling that I was spiraling out of control but unable to stop myself from making a scene. Now, having coaxed my car away from the cliff edge and back to the hotel, I lay facedown and screamed into the pillows. I called a local therapist and begged for an emergency appointment. As I lay there in her office, in the fetal position, I wondered aloud if I should try MDMA therapy.

Weirdly (or magically, as would later be obvious), she happened to have the number of another therapist who worked with it.

The therapist who gave me the second referral said she had a client with whom she'd been working for years who had done a journey. The difference in that patient's suffering, she said, was like night and day. When I called the number, the woman who answered said we needed to meet in person, and when we did, she mentioned that my struggle was why the wait for MDMA to become widely available was untenable. She said, in a stunning lack of expectation management, that she could help me massively—more, in a few sessions, than all my years and dollars of hard therapeutic work had combined.

So after one more conversation, I showed up nervous, but excited, but desperate on a Monday morning (as scheduled) with an empty stomach (as directed) to a charming room with a couch at one end and a bed at the other. After we did something like a prayer, I took the see-through capsule of white powder and retired to the bed with the journal I was encouraged to bring while the therapist went out on the deck to give me space. I'd been told that the journey with psychedelics truly starts beforehand,

the moment you decide to do it, and I had indeed been struggling extra since then. Waiting for the medicine to come on was no exception.

* * *

The Journey. 9:35 a.m. I'm full of grief, and gratitude, and terror. I've been extra wound up and tight, extra untouchable, since we put this on the calendar. My body must be gripping and tensing in preparation to let go . . .

9:55 is when the doubt sets in. About the pointlessness, the uselessness, the futility of this endeavor. A moment ago, I was envisioning lots of purple tears. I'm like, let's just go read a newspaper and drink some tea somewhere.

This is when the therapist, who had come back inside, told me I was higher than I realized, and to lie down and let it ride.

I hadn't anticipated tripping, or time-travel. But there were movies of my life, and visits with loved ones. The therapist had turned on jangly guitar music, which struck me as lame at first, but soon became the most beautiful, dynamic composition I'd ever heard because: Ecstasy. I breathed deep with my eyes closed and a hand on my chest. I cried, often, as I re-witnessed my life.

My therapist said very little. She had said before that our collective job was to trust my intuition. I went back to the scenes where my PTSD started. In one of them, I revisited a remote, bleak room where a stranger cornered me. I watched the scenario—which, in reality, I had escaped physically unscathed—play out with an alternate ending. But I didn't get overpowered and raped, which is what I'd always assumed was so scary about it. Instead, the stranger stepped forward and, in one swift move, landed his hands in a death grip around my throat.

Several times, the scene replayed. Repeatedly, I watched myself get strangled.

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh, I could see, suddenly. *This isn't just a rape issue*, as I'd been working through it in therapy for years. *This is also a murder issue.*

For weeks after the journey, every man I walked past triggered an automatic but definitive—and elated!—voice inside me that said: *That guy's not gonna kill you! Down the sidewalk in a city, that guy's not gonna kill you, and that guy's not gonna kill you.* If I had realized at the conscious level that I thought they would, I would have stopped leaving the house. No wonder I was always exhausted.

After the journey, I stepped down the street with wild new energy. Seeing, finally, the ultimate fear of that moment, my feared choking death, was sort of terrible, I guess, but not really, it wasn't, because: Ecstasy. And as soon as I acknowledged it and saw it through, the moment lost its quiet, powerful rule over my system.

For some people, an MDMA journey ends after a few hours. They sit up and start talking. They drink the water and eat the snack given to them, and talk for a bit as the medicine wears off. And then they leave.

I had to be pulled out of mine. Whether because I have a genetic variation that makes people more sensitive to MDMA or because I am “a very intense person,” around 2 p.m. the therapist had to shake me; it was time to get ready to go—my husband was scheduled to pick me up, and the therapist had another appointment coming. She had me sit up and eat and drink and try to rejoin the present.

When I left some half an hour later, I was cheerful and articulate, but still tripping. My husband, in utter bewilderment over how to handle me, took me to a nearby hotel, as planned. Later, we tried to go eat in a restaurant. I babbled, pleasantly at first, but then, about eight hours after my journey began, everything turned twitchy and dark. I called the therapist frantically and asked her if most people, post-journey, felt like every single thing in their entire lives needed to be burned down immediately, and she said no, not really, but that my job in any case was to “do nothing, very slowly.”

In the clinical trials of MDMA for PTSD, the protocol is to keep patients overnight. The sessions—typically there are three, spaced a month apart—last at least eight hours, because that's



sometimes when the heaviest processing will only begin to kick in, particularly for patients who have a history of dissociation, or severe detachment from reality—which I do. My MDMA therapist, who had been doing journeys for a long time, had never happened to see a person quite like me. But for people like me, researchers say, it's not unheard of for the journey to get ugly at around the time I was in the middle of a dinner date.

But I didn't happen to know any of that.

That night I ran, fleeing from the hotel into the rural darkness, alone. I had total conviction that every facet of my existence was a mistake. I was engulfed in panic. I had no idea what to do with myself, except for one specific thing, as the clear message of it kept ringing over and over in my head, and that message was: GET. DIVORCED.

* * *

"It's harder to integrate if you have a life: a company, a house, a wife," Dr. Y explains to a patient during a phone session one day. Dr. Y, who looks younger than his middle age, paces and stretches while he talks to the man, many states away, who recently started therapy after he lost his relationship, lost his job, and moved—three of the top five stressful life events, psychologists say.

Dr. Y is a psychiatrist, which means he has the ability to prescribe medications, but in this session, this patient's third, he instead asks whether the patient is feeling open to taking ayahuasca after having read all the literature Dr. Y assigned last time. He wants to be sure the man is fully aware of the "integration" process, which could be less charitably called "picking up the pieces of inner-personal land mines," that may follow. Half of Dr. Y's patients enact a major life change after ayahuasca. "Probably a quarter," he says, strongly consider a breakup or divorce.

Dr. Y considers about 90 percent of his patients to be fit for ayahuasca. The one out of 10 he believes it isn't right for could include people with a history of psychosis, mania, or personality disorders, but more often it is those who don't have the support necessary for integration, or aren't ready to be led through symptom management while they're weaned off antidepressants.

That's required by most knowledgeable practitioners. Like MDMA and psilocybin, ayahuasca increases serotonin in the body, and there's a risk of serotonin poisoning if it's taken with certain medications. Dr. Y's patient today doesn't have any of these contraindications. And Dr. Y believes the patient is strong enough to sort through his psychological contents as long as *the patient* also thinks he's ready, which he says he is after airing some hesitations ("You know," he says, "once you pull back a layer, there's no going back, and you can't unsee or unfeel what you saw").

Dr. Y will send him referrals to vetted, reputable providers in his preferred city. "Three nights [in a row] is better than two, and two is definitely better than one," he tells him. First night, drink ayahuasca, open up; next night, dive deeper in. Layers of self-discovery. The soul as a somewhat coy onion. Sometimes, the peeling of it with ayahuasca involves experiencing your own death. Dr. Y gives the patient instructions for the month leading up to his journey: no other drugs, no alcohol, no sex. No reading news, no violent TV; reduce stress, meditate, find quiet. And, in the final week, no meat, no spice, no fermented foods. "The cleaner you go in," Dr. Y, who himself has experienced hundreds of ceremonies, tells the man, "the more impactful the ceremony." Whatever happens, during or after, Dr. Y will be available.

There are downsides to doing things underground. In addition to the obvious threat of arrest, more risks are created at every step of the psychedelic-therapy process by illegality, providers say. There can be difficulty with something as basic as finding and ensuring clean compounds: MAPS helped run an MDMA testing program, and half of the pills sent in didn't contain any MDMA at all; there have been reports of some shamans spiking ayahuasca with a more toxic hallucinogenic plant to intensify the trip. The best-cared-for patient is still disadvantaged by the general lack of cultural wisdom and support around the treatment.

Even good providers aren't as knowledgeable as they could be. Once a year, there is a secret conference that brings together 50 to 100 underground practitioners at a revolving location. "Information gets shared, and people learn new things," says one regular attendee. Another participant recalls lectures on practicalities like the best and most therapeutic doses, how to screen for patients with borderline personality—whom many believe are not compatible with psychedelics—and how different music and sounds impact sessions. But not nearly all the world's practitioners are there. And none of the minutes or findings can be published.

Plus, not every underground patient gets care as elaborate or expert as Dr. Y's. Some don't receive the preparation or follow-up they may need, because they can't afford it, or because in an underground, patients don't have the luxury to be picky about their providers; they may have to take anyone whose number they can manage to get their hands on, and it can be hard for laypeople to adequately vet providers anyway.

An M.D. who used to administer psychedelics (he prefers not to say which) for depression and anxiety (and who, when I tell him he'll have a secret identity—like Batman—asks if he can be Dr. Batman) doesn't provide underground psychedelic treatment anymore because it started to feel too threatening to his legitimate practice, but in extreme cases he still refers opiate addicts to underground providers who work with ibogaine.

"I know quite a few people who do that," he says. "But I only trust two of them. Out of about 10. These are nurses, or respiratory therapists—people that know how to resolve an emergency." Outside of that, there's "a whole subculture" of more amateur iboga and ibogaine therapists, Dr. Batman says. "It's a movement that's driven by addicts helping other addicts. I don't think that's good, per se."

It would be best, in Dr. Batman's opinion, for people to get iboga-based addiction treatment in a reputable clinic outside the country. According to one such center in Mexico, one in 10 patients needs some medical care, one in 100 needs serious medical intervention and, even in the hospital-like setting, people do occasionally die. But not everyone has the money to travel to the best treatment. "It's very difficult for me to make that referral" to the underground for such a risky compound, Dr. Batman says. But sometimes his concern that someone will join the nearly 100 Americans who die of opioid overdose every day overrides his hesitation.

Even for comparatively safer MDMA and psilocybin, says Dr. X, "the fact that we have to do this and hide and send people back to their lives, versus doing it at an inpatient facility," where patients could stay for more integration, is less than ideal.

But all these are risks that people who feel they need psychedelic therapy are willing to take. Nigel McCourry, a 35-year-old Iraq War veteran who participated in a MAPS MDMA study, was so transformed by the PTSD treatment that he was determined to get it for one of his fellow Marines. "This is my Marine battle buddy," he says. "He needed help."

It took a lot of searching and ultimately traveling to another state to find an underground therapist, whom neither Marine knew, and McCourry was acutely aware of how difficult the process could be. For up to a year after his own treatment began, he says, "It was really wild. I had all of these emotions coming up out of nowhere. I would cry at random times. I had to give myself so much space to be able to let that out. I would be crying and I had no idea what I was crying about. It was just really intense."

As a subject in the clinical trial, McCourry underwent three 90-minute preparatory sessions prior to dosing, another long integration session the morning after, a phone call every day for a week, and additional 90-minute sessions every week between the three journeys. His friend didn't have the money or opportunity for nearly that kind of support. But he took the journey anyway. In their infantry unit, 2/2 Warlords, "guys are consistently committing suicide," McCourry says. "I think [MDMA therapy] is really our best shot at solving the veteran suicide crisis."

Elizabeth Bast, a 41-year-old artist and mother, also felt like she was out of options when she and her husband, Joaquin Lamar Hailey (better known as street artist Chor Boogie), flew to Costa Rica

to get iboga therapy at a healing center after Hailey relapsed into an old heroin addiction that both of them felt was going to kill him. When he felt he needed a booster dose six months later, they turned to an underground provider closer by, in the States. Iboga “was crucial,” Bast says. “It saved his life.”

The couple have started organizing and facilitating treatment trips for addicts to other countries (the drug is illegal in less than a dozen). But there are a lot of others they can’t help. Since Bast wrote a book about their experience, “I get inquiries every day: ‘My brother’s dying, and I can’t get out of the country.’ We would love to support that. But it’s too risky.”

Psychedelic medicalization isn’t without its own potential problems. There is squabbling in the underground community about whether it would provoke too much regulation over who can administer medicines, and who can take them and how; or whether it would lead to corporatization, or a boom in licensed but low-quality providers of substances that are so intense. Even now, in the above-ground in other countries, “There are places where it’s done that are very unprofessional,” says Ben De Loenen, executive director of the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education Research and Service (ICEERS), which provides resources for users and potential users of ayahuasca and iboga.

UCLA’s Grob has been called by patients who’ve suffered severe, persistent anxiety for months after a psychedelic-therapy experience, which he says tends to be the result of bad preparedness, ethics, or practices of providers. There are also questions about sustainability. As both deforestation of the Amazon and popularity of ayahuasca increase, shamans have had to trek deeper into the jungle to find the plants that compose it. The increasing popularity of 5-MeO-DMT, called “the Toad” for its origins in the venom sacs of an amphibian—which are milked, the liquid then dried and basically free-based (smoking it is necessary; swallowing it can be fatal)—has led to incidences of people stealing onto Native American reservations to find the frog, leaving empty beer bottles and trash in their wake. If the broader culture ever accepted the species as the path to healing or enlightenment, one can surmise how long it might survive.

Guss, the NYU researcher, sees a future where psychedelic therapy is the specialty of highly and appropriately trained professionals, and a robust field of scientific inquiry. For now, there’s the underground, some developing countries, and the Internet. ICEERS offers tips for vetting practitioners, as well as free therapeutic support to people in crisis during or after ceremonies. MAPS has published a manual for how to do MDMA-assisted psychotherapy on its website, downloadable by anyone.

“Putting out info about how we do the therapy is more likely to contribute to safety than anything else,” says Doblin. On the dark Web, sellers of iboga and ibogaine thrive. There were a thousand people on the wait list for MAPS’ most recently completed MDMA trial. “People are desperate,” Doblin says. “People are doing this.”

* * *

Personally, my integration after MDMA was brutal. Though I eventually returned to my hotel room that first night, my state didn’t improve. I didn’t sleep, lying next to my husband, garnering every ounce of willpower to keep from saying that I was leaving, immediately and forever; my husband didn’t sleep either, blanketed in my agitation.

For weeks, we found ourselves on the floor, or in bed, one or both of us crying as he asked if I still wanted to be married and I didn’t know; and I didn’t know, for that matter, what my personality was (callous? Funny? Was I funny? If so, was I really, or just performing?) or whether I was bisexual like I always thought or strictly gay. My moods swung from extreme openness and optimism to utter despair and stunned confusion.

One day, I spent hours indulging a rich and specific fantasy about filling a bathtub with hot water, downing the years-old bottle of Ativan from when I was first diagnosed, and slitting my forearms from wrist to elbow. Later, in an entirely different temperament, I saw the plan in my Journey Journal and recognized it as active suicidal ideation; if someone had taken the notebook to the police, they

could have legally committed me to an institution against my will.

From the beginning, my MDMA therapist had recommended more than one journey. Next time, she said in one of our multiple follow-up integration sessions, I'd stay all night. I agreed that another journey was in order, but I happened to talk to someone who mentioned an underground therapist with a different practice and whom I got a good feeling from when we talked, and so, three months after the first journey, in a dark and silent room with three other people after nightfall, concerns about my family history of schizophrenia thoroughly discussed and considered, I drank ayahuasca.

On the first night of the two-night ceremony, sitting on the “nests” we each built with yoga mats and sleeping bags on the floor, I was nervous again. But less than last time. After drinking about an ounce of the thick sludge, I lay down. There were the initial sparkles and shooting stars behind my eyes, and after a while, as the facilitators started singing—ancient songs they say come from the plant and help it work—a vision of myself as a five-year-old appeared. There was a suggestion at a history, something bad that happened that I didn't remember; I did not like the direction it was going in; I also thought it was bullshit. The visions stopped. Instead, an abject, suffocating rage came over me, and I lay there in it for five hours thinking about getting in my car and driving away and wishing everyone else in the room would fucking die.

The next night, after a long, raw and still-irate day in the house, the first vision that showed up was five-year-old me again—pissed. She wouldn't talk to me, however much I tried to coax her. I knew I had to get her to engage, which over the course of seven hours involved recognizing that I hated myself, that my self-hatred was my best and most reliable friend, and that my self-hatred would never die until I appreciated how it had protected me; when I did, and it did, I gave it a Viking funeral in the vision and in reality cried harder than I ever had in my life. Then I just had to reckon with shame. I sensed the five-year-old had brought it, actually, not me, but no matter, I assured her: I was the goddamn adult here, and I was going to take care of it. There was suffering and writhing and grief and nausea. I threw up, twice, prodigious quantities of black liquid, once so hard into a bucket that it splashed up all over the bottom half of my face.

A few inches away from me, a woman, who'd recently been in a car accident that put her in the hospital and in a wheelchair for a time, lay perfectly still and silent; a few inches from her, a man gnashed his teeth at visions of his abusive parent. At the other end of the room, another participant relived the night of his father's suicide. In the vision, as in real life, he was unable to stop him from slipping out into the garage to do it. But this time, when the man discovered his father's body and cut him down from the rope, he didn't falter under the weight and drop him, as he did when he was a teenager. This time, he had the strength of his adult self, and when he caught him, he held him. Suspending his own sense of horror and failure, and the calling of the police, and the screams of his mother, he got to hold him for a very long time.

* * *

In November, the results of two large studies showed that the majority of cancer patients who received one dose of psilocybin experienced lasting recovery from depression and anxiety. In February, a paper in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* found that “experience with psychedelic drugs is associated with decreased risk of opioid abuse and dependence.” Medical-journal papers about ayahuasca suggest it can treat addiction, anxiety and depression, and change brain structure and personality.

So far in the MDMA PTSD trials, zero participants haven't improved at all, and more than 80 percent have recovered to an extent that they don't qualify as having PTSD anymore. Estimates for the effectiveness of other PTSD treatments range as high as 70 percent but as low as 50 percent. The number is somewhat contentious, but even “if you think it's only 25 percent” for whom conventional treatments don't work, says Mithoefer, the lead clinician on the trials in Charleston, “that's still millions of people a year in the United States alone.” All the participants in the trials had previously tried

medication or therapy, usually both; as a cohort, they'd had PTSD for an average of 19 years.

But “ultimately, the decision to reschedule [psychedelics from Schedule I substances] is not a scientific one,” points out NYU’s Guss. “It’s a governmental one. We may be able to prove safety and efficacy. But there still may be governmental legislative reasons that rescheduling doesn’t move forward.”

Psychedelic use has been opposed and persecuted by authorities for centuries, both in Europe and in the New World. Among those reasons, believers believe, is the fear that widespread smart psychedelic use could foment societal upheaval. That’s not unlike the belief in the Sixties—but we know more now about what psychedelics do and how to optimize them.

“We didn’t have as much data then as we do now,” says Dr. Dan Engle, a board-certified psychiatrist who consults with plant-medicine healing centers worldwide. “And we didn’t have as many of the safeguards as we have now.” He envisions “the psychedelic renaissance as a cornerstone in the redemption of modern psychiatric care.” Now, thanks to brain imaging, researchers can see that far greater “brain-network connections light up on psilocybin compared to the normal brain. More cross-regional firing. That’s what the brain actually looks like on the ‘drugs’ that we’ve been using for hundreds if not thousands of years.”

This has helped make psychedelics particularly popular in Silicon Valley, where a drive toward self-actualization meets the luxury of having the resources to pursue it. California, where Berkeley-born chemist Alexander “Sasha” Shulgin synthesized and distributed MDMA to therapists for decades before it was prohibited, has long been at the front of the movement; today, Doblin estimates, the state doesn’t have quite the majority, but probably 40 percent of underground psychedelic therapists in the nation. Last year, *California Sunday Magazine* reporter Chris Colin profiled Entrepreneurs Awakening (EA), a company that arranges Peruvian ayahuasca sojourns primarily for tech and startup CEOs. The customers, says owner Michael Costuros, are “super-successful type-A people who use it to be better at what they do.”

“These things are so powerful,” says Eric Weinstein, managing director at Thiel Capital, Peter Thiel’s investment firm in San Francisco, “that they can get into layers of patterned behavior to show folks things that they could change and could do differently. And the brain has probably been playing with these ideas in the subconscious. This entire family of agents is extraordinary, as they appear to be very profound, unexpectedly constructive and surprisingly safe. Most people who take these agents seem to discover cognitive modes that they never knew even existed.”

Weinstein has been considering trying to put together a series of opposite-land “This Is Your Brain on Drugs” public-service commercials, in which other Silicon Valley luminaries and scientists like himself—a Ph.D. mathematician and physicist—out themselves as having “directed their own intellectual evolution with the use of psychedelics as self-hacking tools.”

But even for the super-high-functioning, psychedelic use isn’t just about optimizing. It also, Costuros says, makes them better people: “What I’ve seen consistently happen is CEOs become a people-centric, people-focused person.” After well-administered and integrated psychedelics, “we’re not gonna see the kind of Donald Trump entrepreneurs that are only about extracting value.”

After an ayahuasca journey with EA, an arms magnate left his multimillion-dollar company to build an art and music residency program. Chris Hunter, the 38-year-old inventor of caffeinated malt-liquor beverage Four Loko, went into his trip with EA’s Costuros as a regular former Ohio State University fraternity brother from Youngstown and came out a new man.

“Why are you such a dick?” he says he asked himself on ayahuasca. “What if you approached masculinity in a different way—instead of being dominant and overseeing the women in your life, you came from the other side, underneath, fully supporting and lifting women up?”

Ayahuasca users whom UCLA’s Grob has researched in other countries “have become better partners to their spouses, better parents to their children, better children to *their* parents, better employees, better employers, just more responsible overall, bringing a higher level of ethical integrity to

everything they do,” he says.

It’s possible that psychedelics could transform a wide array of people. Clinical trials have included subjects across demographic categories, including soldiers and conservatives and the elderly and people who’ve never taken drugs at all before. Some of Dr. X’s patients most definitely do not vote Democrat. But the people who have access to psychedelic treatment underground (or overseas) do tend to have something in common: they are usually well-off. “If I could do it legally, I would not turn away anyone for treatment, if I could be above-ground and I could get them to supportive services [afterward],” Dr. X says.

Because of the necessary secrecy and lack of outside support now, he considers it irresponsible to provide journeys to anyone without the time and resources to also pay for integration sessions. (McCourry had to pay for the first journey of his Marine friend, who didn’t have any money; they had to find a wealthy benefactor to cover the next two.) Clients are also mostly white—as are providers. “Sentencing for middle-class white people is a hell of a lot friendlier than for minorities and poor people,” Dr. X says. “It’s a tragedy that people with the most vulnerability, who need it most, we can’t do it with them.”

Doblin, for his part, speculates that the DEA hasn’t cracked down on underground psychedelic therapists because they have more pressing priorities than those trying to heal a select few of the rich, the traumatized, and the addicted. It’s also one thing for psychedelics to be popular with millionaires—and some Nobel laureates and business celebrities you’d never believe, Costuros maintains—and the hip participants of the estimated 120 ayahuasca ceremonies that take place in New York City and the Bay Area every weekend. But who knows what might unfold if psychedelic therapy were available to people for whom the status quo *doesn’t* work so well?

* * *

It’s unclear if the current presidential administration, which includes some extremely drug-unfriendly members, will alter or slow the course of possible medicalization. For the time being, the researchers soldier on, and the underground grows. This year, K., a therapist with a traditional practice in an Appalachian state, administered her first MDMA journey with a client (with two additional medical professionals on hand for safety); the client, who’d still needed occasional suicide watch stemming from symptoms of complex PTSD despite 16 years of therapy, had brought her the MAPS manual, downloaded off the Internet.

“I’m trained to provide the best care to my clients in a way that’s ethical,” K. says, “so if research is backing up that things that are now illegal are really helpful with little to no side effects, especially compared with psychiatric medications, which have a ton of side effects, then it’s something I’m open to.” When dosed, K.’s client, S., talked through a childhood of severe abuse and torture—“but none of it was terrifying,” S. says. “I talked in detail about a lot of horrific shit that happened. Then I said: The thing is, all those things are over, and I know they’re over, and my body knows that everything is going to be OK.”

For Silicon Valley’s Weinstein, the success stories show the importance of advocating for broader access. “If we don’t legalize, study and utilize these plants and other medicines, people who could be saved will die,” he says. “Families will break apart. Parents will continue to bury depressed children who might have been saved by these miraculous agents. Can we bring ourselves to ask if a single professionally administered flood dose of legalized ibogaine could have saved Prince from opioid addiction? Some of these agents are anti-drug drugs... and we are still against them. I definitely would like to attack the idea that any of this makes any sense.”

* * *

So I'd done an underground MDMA session, and a weekend of illegal ayahuasca ceremonies. The integration, as the months went on, seemed to go a bit smoother.

After ayahuasca, I still had good and bad days. The process was still intense but less earthshaking, either because I'd done the first big, tough layer of processing post-MDMA, or because the journey was different, or I was getting used to being unsettled, or all of the above. Or maybe the smoother time was a little reprieve, since something more shattering was about to happen.

After all the months, all the pieces that had been stirred up were not quite connected. I felt I needed one more sitting with the therapist and the psychedelic that at that point felt right. So I settled into a nest on a little patch of floor, again, in the same house as last time, but in a large, high-ceilinged living room full of moonlight coming in through the windows, and I whispered into a cup of ayahuasca a plea for wholeness, and drank it.

The vision is about me, as a five-year-old. Again.

Psychedelics, they say, will not give you what you want. But they will give you what you need.

I'm shocked to encounter the child again, but ready to see what she shows me this time. The child remembers; I remember, though the realization is slow, and the acceptance is slower.

When I thought I cried the hardest in my life the last time I drank ayahuasca, I was wrong.

I cannot (and would not) begin to encompass, in a brief space, what happens in the next long hours, and the next day, and the next night. The second night, the facilitators have to end the ceremony without me. They bless and blow smoke and perfume on the others because after so many hours, they're done, but I'm still deep in it. They take turns staying with me and singing. It goes on for so long, with so much shaking and sickness, that to be kind to my nervous system, my facilitator, who in her day job cares for homeless children, puts me in a bathtub of hot water.

I hyperventilate, for a long time, until I don't. I remember the bathtub-suicide fantasy. The facilitator is sitting next to me, on the floor, putting a soaked hot washcloth against my face, my neck, on my head. I tell her about the fantasy, and that I have come to know, in this bathtub, that I am not going to kill myself.

For a second she thinks I mean I won't kill myself in *her* bathtub, rather than in general. Then when she gets it, the two of us laugh about what a drag that would be for her, if I killed myself here, on drugs in her house, both of us joking about it: me, naked, her, trying to help me save my life.

We're laughing, but this moment is a big deal, and we know it. I am not healed. But I am whole. I can go ahead and get divorced if that turns out to be the right thing, but not because I was violated too many times to bear intimacy. There will be many more spectacularly challenging, professionally supported months of working through the terror and pain imprinted on my body when it was tiny, powerless under adult darkness and weight, but one of the end results has already arrived. The too-many years of my life where I sometimes actively, and maybe always a little bit passively, thought about killing myself are over.

But what has changed, people keep asking me, since the journeys. In my *life*, what difference did it make?

Every single thing is different, I tell them. Because I was splintered before, but now: I'm here.

* * * * *



Martina Newberry

The Msolo Tree Only Sheds Its Leaves at Night

We have made our artless ways across
sentences and stanzas and years.
We are accomplished navigators
even without mathematics skills.

We consider things that we never reveal;
women, after all, are closed journals
with small brass locks and keys.

We suffer insomnia or a kind of narcolepsy;
either one scrapes off that which
covers our souls. We are more cruel
to ourselves than anyone else
could ever be.

Our intervals are peppered with fat facts,
calories, and skin care. We make the small
adjustments and the large ones without
much reflection; turn on a dime (so to speak).

Some teacher I encountered, who told the class
at the beginning that he hated modern poetry,
called late afternoon “the poet’s hour” and
spoke of it as a time of deception.

I have come to see that he was right.
Twilight tells more lies than any other time
of day or night. It points at nighttime
and hints at morning as a tease.

We turn on a dime, as I said, poke at small
adjustments, tackle the large and, even at that,
we allow beauty and cherishing to lead us
to the light and leave us there.

* * *

Wrack Zone

Write me a letter.
Start by describing
the sea at noontime.

Go on to tell me
about the seductive
bit of comforter
that ended up kissing
your ankles after
a dream-filled
night.

Tell me what you
will have for lunch and
with whom you will share
a nap.

Tell me about
your stomach pains
and about your ride
home last night when the
blue Mustang nearly
skidded into you
on the wet street.

Tell me about your favorite
dance track and which girls
are the best dancers
at your favored club.

Tell me if the green/
yellow tint to the sky
says that all may be lost
and if you think it
is a sign of whether
or not there will be
a tomorrow.

Tell me what brand of booze
you are shooting these days
and who took you home
last Saturday night.

Tell me if the divorce
still hurts and if you
wish you had children.

Tell me where you go
after you leave the
communion rail and
if the word “brunch” sounds
as needy and foolish
to you as it does
to me.

Describe the
aleatory nature
of beguilement.

Write me this letter.
Everybody misses
somebody, right?

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

xlii.

"How can we help?" Kinley asks me. Christina smiling at me intently too. Maya nearby, I think. Great Cavern.

"Help?"

They nod. "You're near 3000 pages & 10½ years into this book & you're as excited & uncertain as ever."

I nod. "Help?"

"Do you want us back in a story, or do you to travel with us?" asks Christina, not funning, not flirting. Hmm. OK. I stand. Walk. Think.

Then talk, stutter along.

"It's five years since I pulled all this together, & I've been going steady at it since. But lately—"

"A feeling of stalling, more than uncertainty?" asks Kinley suddenly.

I nod. "To write new I have to account for so much. That's good & it's difficult both."

"What can we do?"

"I guess. I don't want to do it alone. Even though every last word here generates from my mind, written down by my pen in my hand."

They nod. Wait.

Maya appears, Creatures around her, on her shoulders, in her grasp. Carefully sits with the others on the stone from earlier.

"OK." I look at her. "You were looking for Dylan."

"I still want to find him."

"That can happen. As part of this."

This pleases them all somehow, like it takes a little bit of pleasure off that I wasn't aware was there.



"Where is he, Raymond?"

"Let me check"

I look through many pages & lines till I find him with his strange friend at the bookstore.

"He's at Arcadia Bookstore."

"Do we go there?"

I think. I'm not sure. "Let me go first."

The bookstore is vaster than once. Become a great thing. Deep, many-floored. I walk it like I do many times in my dreams.

He is waiting in a little alcove deep in the stacks. Two chairs. A red lamp on a table. We sit.

"It's about Maya."

"Yes."

"She wants to find you. Wants me to cause this to happen."

"OK."

"Do you want it?"

He's shaggier, now lightly bearded.

"Do you have a story?"

"Not yet. I think it will come."

"Should I leave my friend?"

"I don't think you have to."

"How?"

"He's a man of dreams. Let his body keep healing. There's another way to stay with him & be with Maya too."

Looks at me sharply. Thinks.

Likes this. Nods.

xliii.

On the set of *Trip Town*, a TV show yet it's not, I meet a woman who talks to me about *Imaginal Space*—

"In this space, I am a fixtional character talking to you as an equal, a collaborator"

I nod. "OK. Imaginal space."

She smiles. Not all that young, so no lure that way.

We walk around the quasi-set of *Trip Town*.

Many rooms. Guards restricting some of them.

"What restrict a TV show set?"

She smiles. "It's not really a TV show, you know."

"Imaginal space?"

"Yes. If you want to see."

She brings me to the drawing room full of pretty people. Slender blonde girls in short skirts. Close-cropped men in tuxedos. Drinking Scotch, steadily.

"They're waiting."

"Waiting?"

"For the book. Who will be in & how much of a part."

"*Trip Town?*"

She looks at me, finally. "They're not real yet, Raymond. These are cyphers."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you do more with all this or you don't."

"Do more?"

"It's a long book. It's a great world. *It exists validly.*"

"But—"

"Does it matter to you?"

"Matter?"

"Yes."

I wait.

"Go. Leave here. Leave all your slinky half-mystical, half-jailbait fantasies. Leave the Island & the Gate & the Fountain & all the rest.

"*Does this book matter to you?*"

Fair enough. New section.

xliv.

I am sitting with these near-3000 pages now. At a long table made of driftwood.

There are a few Creatures on the table, listening to a man drone on about UFOs on the white-faced pink cat radio—

"—governments do lie, sometimes it's necessary, but is anyone in our government taking seriously this matter? There are 10,000 planets in our local neighborhood of the galaxy. Are we smarter than them all?"

Does this book matter to me?

It does. Sure as shit matters a lot.

What & why? It's love, it's music, it's dreams, it's eros, it's nature, it's magick.

I'd rather write this book than pretty much anything else. At its best, at its least, at my most unsure.

"There are negative beings coming to us. They are separate from those who travel in UFOs. Are these beings coming inter-dimensionally to take humans elsewhere? Astral beings? Inter-dimensional beings? What are the rashes investigators are finding at UFO sites?" The radio drones on & one.

There are beautiful green plants nearby too. Pretty as Creatures. I often say kind words to them because I want to.

Art is how I think & live. How I move through the mortal world. How I *happily* move through. I see

no better way.

I have no answers to give anyone yet I feel moved to a sense of truth in Art.

I return to the woman on the *Trip Town* set.

I look at you. "It was a question worth asking, but it matters to me by how much I devote to it. The hours & pages. This book is my laboratory. It's how I best sing & play."

She nods.

"Imaginal Space is something for me to work with. Nothing more or less real than anything else."

She nods.

"Bugs Bunny. Nicolai Tesla. *Fraggle Rock*."

She nods again.

"The U.S. Constitution. Aboriginal Dreamtime."

She nods. Looking more like Maya.

"Ahh."

She smiles, pleased, flirting, mocking. Can't help herself with me.

"Blink, Maya."

"Why?"

"Just blink . . . your . . . pretty . . . purple eyes . . . for me."

She does. Again.

Now stands facing Dylan. Her wish.

xlv.

I'll tell you more about that convenience store that sits smack above the buried spaceship.

It's called Chief Seattle Friendly Market, though nobody working there knows why. It's not near Seattle or even Washington State. Probably.

When you walk through the door, to your right is a wall of cash registers, of various ages & levels of functionality. There's a really old wooden one, few of us use it, the keys are a strange symbology, there's two cranks, what you'll find inside won't seem to be paper currency anyway. Only a couple of us were trained on it, & didn't pass this training on. They don't care as much as we do.

To your left are the many aisles & shelves of food & other goods. There's a cold case & a freezer & an ice cream case.

Beyond these, keep going, there are a lot of tables, it's pretty much what our town has for a local cafeteria. Some prefer the Red Dog Diner, others come here & stay around for hours. Or days. Chief Seattle's is open 24/7, you see, & nobody *had* to leave.

And I've had my better & worse times here, sure. Nobody trained me first time I walked in the door, still in high school, needing a job. No girlfriend, no real friends at all. I needed *somewhere to be*, some place that needed me. People saying my name & smiling sometimes.

So I had to figure it out, since nobody told me I couldn't work there. I was *not-not* hired.

Nobody was friendly at first. I struggled to figure out the lottery machine. I struggled to figure out the cash registers.

The delivery men took a liking to me though. One in particular took the time to show me how to read a packing list, make he delivered what this list claimed.

Tall guy, lanky but muscled both, eyeglassed. Low gravelly voice. Easy smile for all.

"Would some try to rip me off?"

"No. Well, not most. Not often. But you have to know how to do this. Builds respect among your peers."

I nod.

He looks me closer. "Are you OK?"

I nod.

He smiles, doesn't push. But it's funny that thereafter my co-workers notice me.

There's a girl. She's a singer, & she thinks I'm one too. I don't think I am, & don't know how she believes it of me. She's pretty in an oddball sort of way. Hair really long & colored three colors. Wears layers & layers of shirts, but very short skirts but always black stockings & usually very old boots above her knees. In bed at night I try to imagine sorting through all that & to find a naked girl underneath. Usually ended up with one of my *Playboys* to finish up.

We really became friends the night she organizes an open mic talent show at the market. Not many come but she's better than them all anyway. And that's when I figured out she prefers girls. Her songs & her poems are beautiful & not about boys in the least.

We'd built a stage of sorts. Found lumber out back, she'd brought in some old curtains too. Decorated the stage with lines from one of her poems. It's beautiful. Not for any one girl but some kind of ideal.

That night, I found I can sing. Because I find myself singing the words she drew & painted on the stage, on its curtains, on the floor. The melody comes from deep in me, I don't know where.

She sings it later too. Now just me listening. I think everyone chased away.

I realize I love her but I need to figure out the kind that doesn't involve undoing all those layers of hers. I realize she is something very much more important to me.

Now we're sitting at a table, across from each other, holding hands, still singing her song-poem back & forth to each other.

I want to seal this night we finally found each other, & she told me who she really is, I want to amber this.

She does too. Stands, hands still holding mine. Leads me to the back room, the walk-in refrigerator, cases & cases of milk & juice, frozen overstock.

Pushes aside a curtain in the back I'd never noticed. I look in. An unlit steep staircase.

"Will you come?" she says, smiling me like I'd *never been*.

I nod. Excite a little, think of *Playboy*, calm again. She leads, still holding my hand as we descend. Down, down, so deep into the darkness. Then, a little light, & a little more.

[Wow, it's 80 days, 11½ weeks, from those lines to these, 2½ months! *No*. Really? Yes. This notebook was around. I typed pages from it for *The Cenacle*, returned them after. Took till well into last month to finish that issue. By then I was well into the long stretch it took to get my beautiful silver 2006 MacBoo Pro fixed. Eurydice. She's the same age as this book, within a month or so.

[Now she's good again. Now this page is filling up with lines. My even older iPod Polly, I's say 14 years old, is playing Yes live from 1976! All these numbers, all this time.

[This joint is called Jitters Cafe, set along a main street, in a plaza with a restaurant & a haircut place & some others. Closes most nights 7, weekends 5, so I've never built up more than an occasional interest.

[It's mid-workweek, I've got the edges of a cold, yet it's time to resume these pages. Mid-winter, snow on the ground, yet it's near 60°F out!

[President Clusterfuck is what & yet worse than, what was expected last I was on these pages. He's completely bad news & we're all stuck with him & his rotten cabal with much power for at least 2 years.

[It's good to be back on these pages, some today, even more soon.

[So the great question is: pick up from these lines? Or somewhere else?

[Well it's funny I've got a passel of wooly ideas now, & those 80 days will benefit the pages to come.

[So here goes.]

I follow here down toward the light I guess is a door but am surprised to find her stopped in the doorway.

"Something wrong?"

"This door is *always locked*."

"So someone forgot?"

She looks at me almost accusingly, which is weird because I didn't know all this was here.

I think quicker than I usually do. This all & what's through the door is very important to her. Protecting it with a lock is important too. She's shaken, spooked. OK, got it.

"Should I come back another time?"

Her expression folds on itself. "No. *No!* I'm sorry. I have to find out what happened. I'd feel better if you were with me."

I nod. Lucky guess.

We pass through the doorway but she stays near it to study it. She tries the handles, pulls out what looks like an ancient key to test the lock. Finally, pulls it closed & locks it behind us. Tests. Lock is solid.

Tries to smile, for my benefit, fails, takes my hand tightly in hers & we are now walking down a corridor that glows from some unseen source. There are doors on either side every so often, not in any orderly pattern. Bare of any markings. Walls are bare too, seeming graying white or just even a glowing white to match the light.

"Is this some kind of basement below the store?" I ask timidly.

"No," she says sharply. Then catches herself. Remembers I know nothing, & that she brought me because she *likes me*.

"It's part of an ancient spaceship that crashed here thousands or more years ago."

I stop. "What?"

She looks at me. "I know you can handle this."

"You're not joking?"

"No."

"I don't get it." I felt panicky, like I get in those dreams that don't seem like dreams but like I've come somewhere on the *other side of dreams*.

We've stopped but now she pulls my hand & we're going again.

I try to remember how we've got here, the rest of the night, the open mic, singing, & how spooked she was seeing the door open, but that all seems like my waking life, & this now seems like the other side of my dreams.

I don't slow her again, on talk. We keep hurrying along.

[Not to let go of bracketed statements yet. Now in a bigger joint, bagels, juice, heart of Milkrose, New England, USA. Refill fountain soda, happiness.

[Rush 1980 now, done with Yes 1976. My radio station is featuring nearly all rock concerts this weekend. All good stuff.

[I have some idea of what's coming here. Raw dream material processed. The Myth of the Six Islands.

[So why the brackets & blather? Because I'm not *fully here* yet. When this is best, me & book are one. We eclipse our separateness to become something else together.

[Maybe this is just warming up, to a degree. Letting the eclipse happen as it wills, as it will.]

xlvi.

Dylan joins Maya & Christina & Kinley on the long flat stone in the Cavern under the Tangled Gate. Some of the Creatures get onto his lap too, because he sniffs right, because they are friendly if so to new laps.

I'm still in this scene though wanting to edge out.

"Hey. *Hey!* Mr. Author Man," yelps Christina at my sneaky sneakings away. I pause.

"You wanted our help? You don't want to do this alone?" she reminds like a scolding granny, save for the sexy-as-fuck smile & body. Smirks as I scribble.

Dylan speaks up. "You can go. But maybe not yet?"

I nod. Look at Maya. Expect she's forgotten me, but she hasn't. She's got Dylan's hand for sure, but I don't think she wants me to leave yet either.

"Neither do I," speaks up Kinley with his own handsome smile.

I nod again.

"Read what you've been writing today," says Christina, & it appears they all want this.

I look down at my notebook. All 2974 pages of *Labyrinthine* barely held together in this

bursting old binder.

I nod. I read. My bracketed lines, the ones about the two in the convenience story & below it, & the ones about us sitting together in this Cavern.

"You're standing though," Christina smirks.

I nod.

"Myth of the Six Islands?" asks Dylan.

"It's the story of this world's origins.

They all look on with interest.

I take a breath. "I came to it recently. After writing about a lot of other things." Reach in my pocket & pull out some folded yellow pages. Read from there hereon, but mostly know it all.

"Some, or maybe none of us, come from here. At least originally. Our ancestors are from a faraway long-gone planet called Emandia."

"Don't you know?" asks Kinley with a strange smile.

I stop. Think. "I think natives came later. Evolved like the science books say. Took over through their swelling numbers & blood-lust for violence, control." Kinley nods.

"Long before that, this world didn't have people."

"None?" asks Dylan.

I shake my head. "There were six Islands, clustered together, like those Creatures on your laps. Surrounded by the Wide, Wide Sea."

I pause, scribble all this dialogue down to keep up. Double-check my notes.

Read from them straight for a bit. "Far away, on Emandia, lived a nearly immortal race. It prospered for thousands of years, becoming a high civilization, far beyond what we can easily imagine.

"But their planet's biosphere began to degrade, very slowly, but inevitably toward collapse.

"Fortunately, there were those on Emandia who had understood what was happening, & contrived an idea to find other habitable worlds, & plant beacons on them, when the time of need came. These beacons would provide a safe landing place."

I pause. They are listening. The Creatures are dozing OK, tell on.

"Here's where the story gets stranger. There was no technology in existence to build & transport these beacons to habitable planets. In their native forms, Emandians are very slight, wispy things. Their world of wide seas & forested Islands have never been cleared for the building of cities like ours.

"They didn't divide their lives like we do into waking & dreams. So when they decided they needed help building their beacons, it was by way of the dreams of a young man, studying architecture at University. They first met him in his potent dreams.

The Architect had been an unremarked young man until this contact in his dreams. But this changed him. The Emandians taught him how better to control, direct, & travel in his dreams; he, in turn, studied with a new & furied focus to become a master of architecture.

"How?" asks Christina suddenly.

I pause, think. "There is a place beyond beyond waking, & ordinary dreaming, a Deeper Dreaming. Where all flows, if one allows. Or learns."

Kinley was now studying me pretty closely. "How did the Emandians arrive here first if they contacted an Architect later in our history?" Nodding, confused.

I look down. "I'm not sure. I wonder if time works different, or doubly, or alternatively. Was there a whole race come & gone long before the Emandians came, & the Architect was one of them? What happened to him & the rest of them?"

"Or was he from another planet entirely?" asks Dylan quietly. I nod. This feels more plausible. Scribble. I then continue with what I do think I know. Notes less needed.

"This Architect had been an unremarkable young man until this contact in his dreams. But this changed him. The Emandians taught him how better to control, direct, & travel in his previously



wild dreaming frenzies.

"He, in turn, took up his study of architecture with a new & furious focus, seeking to become a Master of Architecture as well as dreaming.

"He contrived the beacons, what he actually called the Tangled Gates, for their strange qualities, over the years in a nearly endless series of dreams. The Emandians gifted him the same near-immortality they have."

Scribble all this down in *LX* then resume. "I don't know yet how they turned Gates built in dreams into physical objects. I tend to think come from the Deeper Dreaming. The Gates are physical structures, but also are of dream material. *Both*.

"Emandia collapsed over millennia. Its sun collapsed. At first a slow process, but it sped up. There were these Gates on farflung habitable worlds, but how to reach them? The Emandians were still bodied, & had never contrived physical space travel.

"Once again, they worked with the Architect & created something called a Red Bag. This was a dream-portal to the Gates from Emandia.

"But the catch was that whoever took the Red Bag portal to the Tangled Gate could not live beyond its perimeter. They would become, fully, beings of the Deeper Dreaming, sacrificing the physical part of themselves.

"Another method was created. Space capsules were created & a kind of freeze-dried Emandian DNA was contrived for travel. If the capsule hit the salty sea-water of a planet, it would activate this DNA, & an Emandian, two per capsule, would emerge, rise to the surface, perhaps survive.

"I thought they didn't have space travel?" said Kinley, still studying me closely.

I shake my head. And continue. "The assumption was that some of these worlds would fail to provide new homes, & the Emandians would use the Red Bag to transport to another. Perhaps the ones in the capsule would have better luck. It was all a gamble.

Take a breath. Cough. They look at me concerned. I shake it off. "Another aspect of all this were the Creatures."

Countless noses raise, sniff, including Maya's. Maybe even Christina's.

"They were native to the planets the Gates were sent to."

"All of them?" asks Dylan, on whose lap a quartet of shiny-eyed follws sit. Sharp-eyed brown-&-white fox. Pinkish owl. Purple-spotted snow leopard kitty. Tie-dyed unicorn.

I shrug. Not an answer. My notes don't help either though I read straight from them.

"Originally animals of an ordinary kind, the Gate's arrival on their Islands developed in them consciousness & sentience. And awareness of what the Emandians & the Gate were. Creatures are very important to this story.

Christina smirks & snorts.

"What?"

"To your book or to our world?"

"They're the same?"

"You write several."

I nod.

"And notes too."

"Many," I say flatly.

She nods. "OK, OK. Go on. Read the rest. When you've scribbled my wisdoms." They all laugh. Hm.

I half read, half talk. These notes seem less useful as I go along here.

"The Emandians failed on many worlds to find their new home, & would move on. The consequence of this on these planets was catastrophic. The closing of a Gate would annihilate a world's eco-system."

"Are you sure?" Kinley asks.

I study his handsome face. "I'm not sure of a lot. And is this true, or is it what's told? The myth's myth? I don't know how."

"Yet?" asks Dylan.

"Maybe at all."

Wanting to be done, I scribble this dialogue & then bend my face closely into my yellow pages.

"One more important note about the Gate coming to a world. These worlds were chosen for how they resembled the forested Islands & wide seas of Emandia. What would happen to the particular Island where the Gate landed was that it would become, like the Creatures, conscious & aware. A being, a Beast, would emerge from it, a moving personification of the Island & all upon it. The Emandians would have some control of this Beast, but not all.

Pause, not looking up, a breath, a cough. "Stories of the Tangle Gate, Emandians, Beast, & so on would often circulate among the natives of the planet. Since Emandians would have caused their worlds to develop so-called higher forms of life such as men & women. Emandians have no certain gender & fixed gender, but mythologies would grow up gods & goddesses from the skies. Sometimes individuals would try to find the Island, the Gate. Sometimes they would."

Last sentence: "There is always more to discover about these strange stories." Lane ending.

For a bit, the only sound is of me getting all this down in *Labyrinthine*. Emended notes, questions, commentary, dialogue. They wait. Without having to look to confirm, I know the Creatures are dozing.

xlvi.

It always begins long ago in the helplessly immutable gone days of my life.

Young faces. Friends, a girl I loved & it's like a part of my mind never had let go, continues to talk to them, cajole, explain what was this then/now? How little I knew/know! Who were you/I?

But this isn't enough, these grimy old shards of faces & feelings.

I suffered such loneliness.

You suffered loneliness too.

It's why I write to dream worlds

"You come to the Fall a lot?"

"Yah. Years. Not as much now."

"Why not?"

"Places I knew gone. One in particular. Broke my fucking heart."

"Yah. Want a cigarette?"

"No. Thanks."

Another girl I loved & lost a painful piece at a time. Never quite ended. She moved to California. Kept remembering me more & more. She visits my room. We sleep against opposite walls, smiling at each other.

"You there, bud?"

"Yah, sorry."

"Good acid, huh?"

"How can you tell?"

Laughs. "Go back in. I'll watch out for you."

"Thank you."

"No worries."

I am descending a complicated series of ladders & stairs among many people continuously climbing down. At one point a black kid smiles & says, "You got a draft!" & points at my open zipper. I discretely zip up.

Someone is addressing & sending my book off to a publisher, my book with a cover of green & gold, a great tree pulses on, & then a labyrinth, into a white envelope, puts an "attention of" on the envelope, "it will get there, don't worry," & I hesitate *& yet so want to be in the company of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner.*

I wake, wildly, at my cash register, *shit*, bookstore, that blonde girl sitting behind the counter near me, smiling, *how many hours have I worked today?*

"That's a nice bookstore. I used to go there all the time to read. I can't go there now"

"Why?"

"Oh, eh, they said I tried to take copy of Rilke. *Letters to a Young Poet*. It was so tiny. They didn't understand I just wanted to read it under the stars in this park. Borrow it. 'Not a fucking library.'"

Fall back. The coffeehouse is a deep maze extending back miles, it seems, to caves where people live, to the shore of the Wide Wide Sea.

I walk into the Sea but do not sink, begin to ascend an invisible staircase to the sky, it's like the *Death Book*, ascending, into the gone world. Now more staircases, many people, moving in every direction, as I move in deeper it's more like a book I am in, reading my way through an elaborate labyrinth, trying to read/climb my way up/down/out—

The black kid looks at me & smiles & nods. Says, casually,

*"What if Dream-Mind
is Supra-Consciousness?"*

"Whoa! That's heavy. You OK in there?"

"Yah. Thanks."

"No worries. What do you see?"

In my bedroom, there is a little door in the wall. It's a long tunnel filled with plants, & my mother & I crawl in there to look at them al, need to keep it secret, door shut dark, though we are in there—

I fall asleep against her shoulder, her arm around me, as never between us, & there is a genocidal civil war that comes to a rebel village & all are slaughtered save a group of small children hid in the rubble of a school, & later smuggled out of the country, brought to a military housing compound, & grow up together, one is different, older, had been tasked to hid the rest & escape—

There is a soldier she goes in the shadows with, a thin short blouse & bare thought of a skirt, her hair in pigtails, her lips glossed in bubblegum pin & she kneels before him & sucks his cock in as deep as she can & then stands & leans against the wall, her white panties pulled off by his teeth, his cock so deep in her tight bare cunt & she moans for him, loves him because once he has cum in her cunt, her ass, her mouth, he dresses her in fresh clothes & gets her out of the compound back to her village to

take whatever pictures & trinkets she can find before they come & burn it completely out of existence.

Brings her back to camp with her heavy sack, carries it for her, there's a tree where they always stop, it's where he feeds her dried meat & cheese, tucks more into her sack—

"I couldn't save her" he tells Bowie so many years later "or any of them" some nights tells this swilly sloppy liquored, some stone cold dry, "couldn't even be tender to her" swill "had to feel like I was taking much & giving back little"

But under this tree, the last time, he just holds her, he wipes off her smeared bubblegum lipstick, & kisses her, one, twice. Three times. Then he's gone.

"What happened to them?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask back then. Took much. Gave little."

"Save her." Nods.

"What are you, a sci-fi writer? *X-Men* & *X-Files* & *Star Track* & all those?"

"Yes. No."

"Gotya."

It was always hard traveling with my notebooks & a sack of Creatures. Fear of loss on all sides. Panicked many times. Grew not to care what drivers & passengers thought.

Oh, I'd sit with them in my lap when I could. Them talking in my mind when they chose to, not liking the English so much, spooked by it

"They really talked back?"

"Sure. Or just sniffed."

"Yah?"

"One was a dalmatian, black spotted, crooked smile. Liked to tell corny jokes. *So funny.*"

xlvi.

I'm in a too large bedroom in my mother's house or apartment & the dark-haired girl in the tight sweater comes in, at 1 in the morning. It's the only time she can come to see me.

I'd known her back in high school, but not really. She'd been blonde then, shorter, a cheerleader naturally; now her hair is raven black & she hugs me often.

I keep my stuff at one far end of this too-big bedroom. I have a small bed, too small for me, a crate of books, a table & a chair, an open blue suitcase of clothes.

I keep taking pills from her pink pill box, the one with the Disney princess half scraped off its cover, until I realize what I'm doing & stop—

My mother is around, not unfriendly, but I don't really want her around. There's only one light in my room, the lamp on my table, & I usually turn it off when this girl arrives. I like her a lot, *try not to blow it again this time*

Her scent is light flowers & light scent next to me, a hand held in mine, our bodies comfortably close

but not too so, & we close our eyes & begin our work—

[The book-movie-Island opens itself slowly, it's taken time to learn how to read-watch-travel it—it's a history, the telling of the history, the telling of the history, the telling of the telling, & the Island upon which it all occurs—it is helpful to have her along, she smiles sexy without trying, without want or wish—we move—read—watch & are helped out of traps & dead end events]

[[I have one more possession which she deeply loves. It is a white-faced pink cat radio. She eventually undresses to her pink panties & half-shirt, & I turn the old dial bit by bit till I find an old old radio show, hundreds of years old, no talking, no human sounds, more like a tiny microphone travelling multiply in a deep Woods, an empty canyon, a roiling seashore, mixed in a kind of sound kettle, like physical ingredients to produce something she breathes in like an erotic narcotic]]

[[[And I realized once again shocked that we are on a stage, that an audience near & far in time & space are watching us come every day we meet, find wisdom & teaching soul in our performance]]]

[[She rolls atop me with her legs wide & I feel my cock push against her pink panties, push nearly in, nearly in, till she relaxes & curls more calmly into my grasp. Better. Better.]]

[The Book-Movie-Island now expands all around us & we are scooped into a cartoon desert as though we are fireflies watching the Coyote in hard chase, & he curls himself into a giant rubber band which Road Runner pulls back & releases & he is flung out of his world, us clinging to his flying fur, & into a room of computer terminals, & now he is just an unmoving figurine shuffling along until someone picks him up & up onto the top shelf of a bookcase]

She rolls close to me, kisses my lips quietly, sits up to dress. Her back is covered in symbols & markings & pictures, I'd so like to read sometime.s

Later we are at a science fiction convention & I'm one of the guests of honor.

["I knew it!" he says, swigs his flask, so pleased.]

Her dark hair, in long braids, her clothes a sort of layered series of braided furs in many colors.

We are standing in a field at the back of a crowd watching a film by a cool brilliant director. He's standing with us, black shirt & trousers, crimson hair, three cool eyes all covered by his custom shades—

The film is on a small TV set high up on a platform, a black & white TV, & the film muddles & drools out from the TV down to the ground, & slowly touches each watcher.

Soon I am covered in the film of a bedroom with a kind of terrarium in it, where live two tiny Kitees with wonderful bloo eyes & I warn them not to roam when I am away but they are curious & do, & I come home to find them in the next room with a bigger cat cornering them & knocking them around, going to eat them, & I step up & pick him up & toss him out to the hallway, & then step out there & toss him down the hall, not hurting him, just following him & tossing him, it's a long hallway, & I follow & toss & follow & toss, till I return to my small curious friends & bring them to their terrarium, will they roam again? Yes, I know so. I am ready.

I wipe this film off me, try to get it all, but when the next rolls over me I feel bits of it melding into the

new one, the Kittees are still on my mind, & I decide it's not safe here & I find my bit of cardboard by which they are willing to travel with me, & fill my knapsack with notebooks & ragged clothes & my old Walkman from some other film that floated past me & stuck & we climb downstairs to the faux pizza joint wherein, through the green & gold back door, one finds a model of a city, you can walk around it, admiring its deep & flawless detail, you can also walk within it, & we are nowhere, & I wonder where she is, whichever one, it's Valentine's Day, I am young & lorn, my mailbox as empty as Charlie Brown's, & I could go on & on like this, with my knapsacks of notebooks & pens to help me make my woeful poems, the Kittees with bloo eyes on the cardboard nearby but the heavy man who made all this is sitting in that faux pizza joint feeling like nobody gets him & I walk in & put my hand on his shoulder, & keep it there awhile, squeezing, releasing, squeezing, releasing—

Intermission. The showeres fall on us all: Start fresh in a little while. She is smiling at me. I be her movies were pink candy & sing songy compared to mine. But she's got some better idea as she moves into my embrace, twine, twine tighter, & the second half begins & the next washes over us together.

[Page 3000] The world is evacuating to a great ship, but everyone must be accounted for, must get a photograph taken & sign a line on a clipboard, there are dozens, thousands of clipboards, & the great ship moves slowly across the world from time zone to time zone, & people in long lines, & *everyone* must be found, it's a slow process—

We are in a tiny bedroom in the ship, a single bed of a room, & naked & her hands all over me, & her moaning & breathing, & touching, "I'll be your pretty Valentine, I'll be your pretty Valentine, *mmm*, I'll be your pretty Valentine, I'll be your pretty Valentine, *mmmmmm*, I'll be your pretty Valentine, I'll be your pretty Valentine, *m m m m m m m m m*, *pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty Valentine*."

xlix.

The muse is in the details. I woke with that this morning, lover in my arms, scent, touch, weighted form—

I look around & find myself in the Great Cavern below the Tangled Gate—what is it actually like here? How does it feel?

It's not brightly lit, more of a glow that seems to emanate from the rocks & stone floor themselves—

Air circulates through the cavern, soft & silky, like a loving stroke from a lover's hand.

And I think there is also a low *hmmm* present.

I look up at the great Tree in the center, it's like it rises up beyond the cavern itself. What does it reach toward?

I walk over to the tree, & pull myself up on its lowest branch.

Taking a breath, & wondering what I was doing exactly, I grab up to the next branch above me, & clumsily pull myself upon it. Hm. That wasn't as bad as the first time. Looking below, I can see from my slightly elevated position the glowing cavern before me.

Glowing, musical in its natural architecture. I can see the several cave tunnels that lead into the cavern.

Move again, grab onto the next branch, it's more of a reach but I find it easier to stretch up for it, pull myself rawly up to it, like a pull-ups bar, nothing I could have done just yesterday, this is weird but OK, I'm on it & unwinded, & reach up & climb again, picking up speed as though gravity is flaking off me, & climbing & climbing & I look down & see the cavern as deeper & broader than before, & now I see there are Creatures looking up toward me, sniffing, & a'sniffing.

Climb & climb up & up, feeling like I should have a tail, & I'm wondering what the light is up there, soft & blurry, sugary, sugary? Yes, that's a good sense of how it feels.

Sugary & *hmmming* of course, like clambering up like a monkey into cotton candy.

Where to? I sniff quickly as I climb & climb into the cotton candy light & arrive completely somewhere else, & the narrative shifts here, shifts here, shifts here, I feel awhile more cotton candy than monkey even—

"I was in a large room with many people, mostly friends, the room feels like it's tipping slowly back & forth, like being on a very large boat"

He nods beside me, finishes his glass of pale yellow liquid, shakes his head yes to the grey-haired barman gent for another, on me.

"I slide in my seat against someone, & wild to find my balance, & it's the girl I'm in love with, she looks like the dark-haired actress from that TV show from back when yknow, she wore pigtails & very short shorts but only spoke in some unknown language to her family & teachers"

"Yah" he sips, not very interested, "except to the little Creatures who lived in the walls of her bedroom" — nods to the barman again—

"The room shakes & now she slides into me, & for an elongated moment she stays close with me, it feels so good, until I let her go, no words."

He's slowing down but another nod, & another pale yellow drink in a tall glass.

"Later we're all in line at the airport, & being directed to our gates, & I look for her, & others assure me, *she will marry him*"

Now his glass is empty.

"The muse is in the details" he says, finally, echoing my waking words & embrace.

L.

I look for the fuzzy cotton candy entrance up through the floor, from the tree I climbed up from the Great Cavern that I thought was below the Tangled Gate.

Don't see it, just the usual dark floor. I want to get back down there but don't know how.

So I nod to Mr. Bob the barman & I leave the bar, right through the door onto the street.



I walk down the street, not long till I come to the Noah Hotel, decide to walk in, no revolving doors, just an intricately carved oak set of doors, tinged green & gold, push in to the entirely mirrored lobby, it's glaring & dizzying, I nearly fall kneeling before it all.

On whim, I close my eyes, stand & start to walk forward through the lobby, sniffing & *hmmming* as I go, stumble a bit, but something starts to emerge, shapes? colors? But it's not the lobby that one would see eyes opened.

It's the . . . Cavern? How? I open my eyes & find I am in a hotel hallway, nor surprising; close eyes, & I'm surrounded by Creatures looking up at me, sniffing—

Maya is standing there now, smiling & scrawny, blonde hair pink striped, wearing a vinesy leavsy dress to her knees, like she's waiting for me—

"Wandering?" she asks.

"I suppose," I say.

Still smiling, sincerely if bemused, & holds my hand, "Come with me now."

Peeking, I see she's leading me down the hallway just as she is leading me up a cave tunnel away from the Cavern.

We walk & walk up the tunnel, climbing & climbing, but coming to an even darker place.

Her hand seems to evanesce in mine, holding tighter makes it worse, so I loose, & a bare touch of her remains in my grasp.

Come to this very dark place & when I peek open my eyes tis just as dark, a room? Hotel room, bed?

Maya's in bed with me, in my arms familiarly, even as I stand in this dark place, waiting, listening. Nothing yet.

"Hello."

A stir of air.

"I'm Raymond. Author of *Labyrinthine* & *Many Musics*, & helper to Mr. Algernon Beagle in publishing *Bags End News* stories."

Another stir. But no more.

Open my eyes. Maya naked & scrawny in my arms, watching me.

"You're Dylan's."

"And my own. And one of your muses."

"The muse is in the details."

She giggles, amazingly.

Close my eyes. Still nothing.

I start walking though the darkness when the stir rises a bit more. I'm talking to a breeze or in breeze language?

Open my eyes, atwist in Maya's grasp, I can't tell if this is sex or just a playful sweet grasp.

Close my eyes, sit. Silence.

Talk. "I need you here, Maya, & now."

Open my eyes, her purple eyes glinting at me, nodding, & close my eyes to feel her back with me there too.

Now something will happen.

li.

Another book inside the book inside the rest, begins here:

"In an office, divided in half by a counter for transacting business, & behind it a small Asian woman, Mrs. Ling, & she & I are new friends, & before I leave, I reach over the counter to grasp her small hand & smile, then go, her yellow face blushing, gives a happy cry—

"Walk into the street, empty & early morning light, none of the stores I pass by are open save for a tiny little donutshop emitting a red metallic glow. Hm, walk in to find a brown man behind the counter, he smiles his tooth a red metallic glow too, sees me, gives a happy cry—

"I wake up later at one of the two tables & the man is gone. Not sure what next, so I leave & walk down the early evening street till I come to a pharmacy, walk in to find my lover waiting for me to find her some foot lotion, I look & look, but she happens upon it randomly, & gives a happy cry—"

Bowie gives a yawn.

"Yes?"

"Get back to the story."

"Isn't this?"

He laughs, nudges Maya to move over a bit in the bed.

We lay open the overstuffed *Labyrinthine* notebook on the bed.

Maya leans against me familiarly & Bowie uncaps pen & hands me.

"Try again."

lii.

Try again.

A room. There is a room that will be a Place of Art. One way to get there is through the back door of the college. Another way is to find the bar down the street from that donut shop, go in, look for its extra room—

I have painted a picture on a folding canvas, revealing different pictures depending upon how it is folded; come to find the room that is the Place of Art & hang it there—

I've been jobless for a few months now, running low on rent money, this folding canvas idea in my last

shot before—

—Bowie shakes his head.

I nod.

“What then?”

“Start a new section.”

liii.

Pen, notebook of paper, music on headphones. Clapton from early '70s. OK. A night street. No donutshop. No bar. No pharmacy.

No sign of the Tangled Gate amongst the city traffic. Of an Island. A Cave. White Woods. The mysteries of the world seem swathed in the mundane human flow.

It's why I've kept starting & stopping tonight. The mysteries seem too hidden in the mundanties.

So I try using my dream journal notes, dreams a source of power for me always, imaginative power. But again I can't maintain it. Too distracted, too hurried.

Simplify, focus. Here, this page, this pen. Better, always better, words move with something like purpose, momentum.

Resume, renew, what?

Mundanties, that's what. Through the window of this coffee shop. Brick sidewalk. Old, stained with time. Older than me maybe, & me past half a century & another one next week. Here they are, I am, this book is, right now.

Rows & rows of them, reddish color, enduring all this city's weathers, cold, hot, wet, icy—laid by who, how long ago?

[I look at Bowie. He shrugs.

I look at Maya. Small smile & nod. OK then.]

New section. *Raise the game.*

liv.

I ask myself: what beyond Emandia & Bowie's home & this world? What at the beginning, what at the end? How can any man who lives an invisible fragment of it all know or be capable of knowing?

I wonder & wonder. I can't explain myself, any thing around me, those old bricks through the window. I can look through the window & recall all the many times I've passed this window—

lv.

So what then?

I remember a stretch of months many years ago when I came home every night from a day of college,
& sat with my brothers & books on an old couch, & read & read all evening—

Focus of time energy & attention—

I got 4 As & a B that semester—

These fragments tonight were not like that—they were trying to fake on through some pages—whatever
their possible value, they became crumbled & fallen—

If a book matters, it matters, Not among a crowd of this & that.

This book is like a room which is a Place of Art. Tended when visited, tended properly. Or it gets old,
worn, impotent, undervalued & underloved.

The words come, sometimes even the music through them, like & only like this.

[I nod.
Bowie nods.
Maya nods.
New section.]

lvi.

Another birthday passes. I sigh. Wonder whither this book next.

“Whither next?”
“Back to the story” glints Bowie.
“Or elsewhere” counters Maya.
“The mysteries of the world are so many, so large, so small.”
They nod.
“So what then?”
Bowie leans into me, blue eye, green eye, mushroom eye.
“Go, Raymond. Take a breath & then another & go”

I do, & do.

I start a long time ago, before this book, its predecessors, before Creatures, Tangled Gate, Island, & all.

I didn’t know in a different way. I had not even take a measure of some of the human world.

I had no interior of my own, just a sucking within me for what was without.

I knew even less what I still do not know now.

Reaching for those years is like being in a strange room filled with weird trinkets & a kind of anti-music, & everything is very close & also very distant.

I reach & reach & only come up with images. A street in a suburb where I delivered newspapers every day at dawn. I used to pull out the advertising supplements to keep, privately masturbate to their images of girls in bikinis. Sometimes one would catch me with her eyes, her smile. I still haven't full learned that beauty, physical beauty, much or little of it, has nothing to do with empathy, virtue.

A fat man, college history teacher? reading to me from Wordsworth, lines I've kept forever:

*Hence in a season of calm weather,
though inland far we be,
Our eyes have sight of that
Immortal Sea
which brought us hither,
can in a moment travel thither,
& see the Children sport upon the short,
& hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.*

I now write of the Wide Wide Sea as source of all life, as where Emandians arrive in seed pods, as possibly where & how all human life came to this world

Have I travelled so very far?

My eyes still sight & hunger bikinis.
I know it's DNA.
I still deliver newspapers in my dreams.

The past still trails around me & in me.

My brothers was sick this week in hospital, but when I think of him, he's sitting in a corner of the kitchen among his books & his black & white TV, laughing mock-evilily, talking of spaceships, dinosaurs, & Catholic priests he's befriended.

It's like the mind is a changing soup along time & space, absorbing & keeping & discarding & repeating gestures of behavior, patterns in its depths, spectres known & unknown, & the world is a seething cauldron of soups, speeding through space—

I used to work at a bookstore near this hotel lobby, for 3 years this area was my 5 day a week home. The last day of that job, nobody caring that I was leaving, there was a blackout. I left there, that store, its technical books & people, in the dark, not a goodbye or farewell to be had—it's now a restaurant I entered once, so many years later, what I remembered vividly gone, as I said goodbye & farewell to my boss of a different job as she moved on—

This book is now 11 years old & I've grown used to writing it. No point in new pieces with new names. It was with me before the Tangled Gate & Island & so on, & helped shape them to be.

I struggle with it when I don't give it time, energy, attention, this like mantra of right conduct in my mind—

Yet even this short stretch with it feels good, this book feels good to me—

“OK?”

They nod.

“We need to reunite the Six Islands.”

They are quiet.

“Maybe they are the world & yet also me too. I’m not sure how that works. What it looks like or what next.”

Listening.

“This book began with what sounded like six gunshots, one for each of the original six characters.”

Listen.

“That’s how this world began in a way. Something suddenly happened, & there was reaction to it. Not knowing what it was.”

[.]

“So maybe to see parallel between these. What were those gunshots? Were they shots at all? Were they somehow what had sounded at the beginning of history? Did they echo through time & space & history?”

.

“Maybe I need to trace back as well as trace on. Find how these things differently & samely affect the soup of this book & the mythology of which it is a part.

“It’s exciting when I feel the acceleration. When idea speeds into scene, character, action, & something else that is like & unlike fire.

“I need to gather together some of what is scattered here, old & recent.

“I need to use my mind as thread & glue & encouraging music for what is scattered high & low. To see this all as one, none, many.”

Nod. Smile. Let them embrace me close in our shared bed.



To be continued in Cenacle | 100 | June 2017

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper feature regularly in these pages.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado, where he is putting together a foundry, for his artwork. He has recently founded an intentional community called “Mining Nomads.” More of his great writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. He is a new contributor to this journal, and recently wrote to me: “Art for me is equal parts camera and escape hatch. I don’t take pictures; I write poems. Rather than flee from my problems, I prefer to face them in words, depicting the absurdity of life as best I can.” His poems in this issue previously appeared in *Rattle*.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 98 | December 2016. His 2015 poetry RaiBook, *Kingdom of Clowns*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/kingdomofclowns.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

David Hartley lives in Maryland. His *Rants* last appeared in *Cenacle* | 98 | December 2016. Keep on swingin’, Dave!

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 98 | December 2016. Jimmy’s new book, *The Reality of Hunter Gatherers*, was published this year by White Poppy Press (whitepoppypress.com).

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His prose in this issue is from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in the pages of the *Cenacle*. We recently had a delightful phone call.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. He is also a new contributor to this journal. But he & I have been work colleagues for a number of years now. It is a delight to connect in this new way.

Mac McClelland is an award-winning journalist and author of *Irritable Hearts: A PTSD Love Story* and *For Us Surrender Is Out of the Question: A Story From Burma's Never-Ending War*. More of her work can be found online at: <http://mac-mcclelland.com>.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. She is also a new contributor to this journal. She wrote to me recently: "Art absorbs my longings and fears; it creates an opportunity for beauty and wonder to awaken my subconscious and deepen my conscious awareness. Where chaos exists within or without, art can restore a kind of order. Where order has become rigidity, art can loosen the binds. Deep within each of us, I believe there is a desire to know art, if not to create it."

A.A. Milne was born in London in 1882, & died in Sussex, England in 1956. His most famous works are *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928). Scriptor Press published selections from these two wonderful books, entitled *The Book of Pooh*, in the 2016 Burning Man Books series, found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 98 | December 2016. Her poems in this issue are from her new book, *Never Completely Awake*, which is available at <http://www.deerbrookedititions.com/never-completely-awake>. Her website is <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Thinking today of Tom & his son Jamie, & wishing them good health & all manner of other good things.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is a beautiful, restive soul, who imbues the pages of this journal with a quirky, spritely, & indelibly lovely mien.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. In a scant few minutes, I shall be whisking myself away from home & hearth to the big city to find the machines & materials that will produce this journal's physical form fresh for tonight's Jellicle Literary Guild debut.

* * * * *



The first revolution is when
you change your mind
about how you look at things,
and see there might be
another way

at it

have not

to look

that you

been shown.

--Gil Scott-Heron, 1982.

FIGHT
TRUMP



